Something along those lines

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Something along those lines

by Wawa4me

Summary

Minato Namikaze thought he was good at quite a lot of things, but maybe not parenting. Otsuka Nara believes wholeheartedly in her boyfriend, but not so much herself. However, Minato is likely going to be the future Hokage and Otsuka has a hard time saying no to people, so is it really a surprise their life is chaos? Kakashi doesn't think so.

Or

Otsuka Nara attempts parenting every stray her boyfriend brings home.

Chapter 1

A quiet yawn escaped Otsuka's mouth and she rolled over bumping into something. She growled and proceeded to push it away with as much force as possible before a loud 'Thump!' and an audible shout cleared away the haziness of sleep. Crap! Not again.

"Minato!" She pulled herself forward and looked down to see him on the floor in a heap. Sitting up he glared at Otsuka and began rubbing his head.

"What was that for?" He sounded like a pouting child.

"Ah, sorry, I didn't realize that was you."

"You seem to be making a habit out of this Otsuka." He wearily raised himself and stumbled towards the dresser. He blindly grabbed at a drawer and pulled out the clothes on the top. Otsuka giggled, scooting towards the edge of the bed and resting her head on his pillow.

"Minato honey, as thoughtful as you are, that's my nightgown, and I'd rather you not stretch it out." He looked down and sighed, resting it on the dresser. This time reaching for the proper drawer he turned to Otsuka and gave her a tired smile.

"Maybe it's time to get a new bed, this is the fifth time you've pushed me out." He chuckled. She'd only just moved in with him six days ago, it hadn't even been a full week and things seemed to be just a bit too tight. He was used to living in his small apartment alone, and now with an extra human things weren't exactly going as planned.

She groaned and got out of bed. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to be causing such a disturbance for you." Folding her nightgown, Otsuka returned it to its original spot.

"Otsuka, that's the point. We'd know something was wrong if the transition was seamless." He pulled his blue shirt over his head and tossed his night clothes into the laundry pile at the foot of his bed. Otsuka gives him a look and he gives her a sheepish smile in return. Yet another issue that presented itself. Minato wasn't a slob but he could be very lazy when he wanted to be. She just didn't understand why he couldn't buy a laundry basket to put in his room.

"Well, I could always move back, I'm sure Shikaku wouldn't mind-"

“Otsuka.” His voice is soft as he turns his girlfriend to face him. Pressing his forehead against hers he pulls her into a hug. His eyes shine with mirth and something akin to love. “I want it this way. We’ll fight and have our disagreements, but I’ll always be coming home to *you.* ” His words hold a heavy meaning but his tone stays gentle and caring.

After a few moments she hugs him back and he tightens his hold as she snuggled into his neck. Finding nothing but warmth Otsuka eased into his body. Neither could promise everything would work out but there is one thing they couldn’t deny. When they were together, they were home.

Chapter 2

Otsuka threw herself to the floor. Staring up at the ceiling she pondered what in the world she was going to do. Minato had left three days ago and he wouldn't be back for the next few months. Konoha was being hounded on all fronts and every shinobi was being worked to the bone to keep Konoha on top. Except Otsuka wasn't a shinobi, and she didn't have a job.

For as long as she could remember she'd taken care of her mother and grandfather. The both of them struggled because of their medical problems. Her grandfather died four years ago, and she'd only agreed to move in with Minato a few months after her mother had died. They'd always used both her grandfather and mother's retirement pay and what was left in their pockets.

Otsuka could hear Minato's late alarm going off faintly in the background. She didn't feel like turning it off, she always let it go on for the full thirty minutes and didn't bother to turn it off. She wasn't used to an empty home. The few friends she had were all ninjas, mostly either children of people who were friends with her mother or grandfather or ninja who were friends with Shikaku.

She could always visit her cousin's wife, Yoshino, but she was busy as wife to the newly appointed clan head and Otsuka wasn't interested in being pulled into clan politics. Standing up, Otsuka grabbed her coat and left the apartment. She headed down the busy streets looking for stores with openings, asking around and coming up with nothing. Her search continued well into the night before she was ready to give up. Finally she took a turn to the Hokage tower and went to find someone who might have a list.

A chunin on desk duty was kind enough to give her the list and write down addresses, but all of the openings required one to know the trade. Seeing Otsuka's upset face, the chunin told her he'd inquire about any other openings and if she came in tomorrow he'd let her know what he'd found. She thanked him and left, heading home.

Otsuka sighed, she hated feeling useless. When she was helping her mother and grandfather she felt needed, everything she did had a greater cause and she enjoyed her family's company. Otsuka loved Minato, but he didn't need her in the same way her mother and grandfather did. They both relied on her to live. If she was gone, they wouldn't be able to live with the same ease; and Otsuka wanted to be

needed, because she had been needed all her life, and who was she really if no one else needed her.

It was in her own feeling of worthlessness that brought her to the first step of finding herself. The bitter cold nipped at her fingers and she drew her coat closet to her body. She stared at the ground, letting her feet lead her home by memory. At the turn of a corner she ran into someone. Someone familiar, Inoichi.

The blonde gave her a concerned look as she apologized profusely. “It’s alright Otsuka. How are you?”

“I-I’m alright. I thought you were on a mission.” She commented, fingering one of the buttons on her coat.

“I got back last night, I’ll be gone tomorrow afternoon though, I came back to get Shikaku.” Otsuka lifted her eyebrows but didn’t ask anything. She was surprised her cousin wasn’t with Inoichi in the first place.

“Well I’ll let you get to it then.” Otsuka gave him a small forced smile and moved to leave but Inoichi caught her hand.

“Would you be interested in coming along with me to see Shikaku? He hasn’t seen you in at least a month. I know he isn’t adjusting well to you not being in the compound and ready to help at any hour.” Both Otsuka and Inoichi knew it was a bad attempt at trying to find out what was wrong but Otsuka was too tired to care. If Inoichi thought talking with Shikaku would help then she would try.

The two walked quietly towards the compound and as they drew nearer Otsuka felt a deeper sense of dread build in her stomach. She wasn’t sure why but it was getting harder and harder to keep calm.

Inoichi knocked on the door and Yoshino answered the door, smiling and welcoming them both in. Taking their coats, Yoshino ushered them into Shikaku’s study complaining about needing to get ready for something.

Shikaku and Inoichi spoke in hushed voices before Inoichi left, leaving Otsuka with a comforting smile. Shikaku turned to his cousin and motioned for her to join him sitting at the shogi table. She followed him, avoiding the anxiety that was bubbling inside her. The game started out as usual, Otsuka attempting to catch him off guard with moves he might be surprised by, she’d tried to out smart him enough times to know it wasn’t going to work.

Halfway through the game he spoke. “You’re the only Nara I know who is genuinely bad at Shogi.” Otsuka winced and drew her hand away from the piece she was going to move.

“I was just never able to catch on.” Otsuka looked anywhere but at Shikaku, she could feel his gaze and she knew the moment she looked at him she’d lose all composure.

“But you were never a normal Nara.” They’d always had a close relationship, they were born in the same year, and so while he knew little Otsuka had been far more annoying and self centered than she was now, he also knew she was just as passionate about her family. Shikaku knew Otsuka was struggling right now, she had been ever since her mother died. All she had ever done was take care of her family. Her childhood was short and she’d grown up faster than anyone else he knew.

So when Inoichi came in with Otsuka on a cold winter night, only a few days after Minato had left, he knew what needed to be done.

“You never napped, bad at shogi, you don’t visit the dee. You don’t even like cloud watching. You’re not very much like the typical Nara are you?” Shikaku raises an eyebrow at her, more like a way to get her to respond than anything else.

Otsuka started to tear up. She picks up a Shogi piece and rubs it between her fingers. “I know.” The panic feels ready to burst out of her. “I know.” And then, finally, Otsuka feels it all explode inside her. The king in her fingers flies out of her hands and into a far corner of the room.

“I *know* that I don’t fit in here! I’m useless and stupid! I can’t do anything important and I’m not good at anything!”

Shikaku smirked. “I beg to differ. You’ve spent all of your life caring for retired ninjas, you always dropped by to make sure I’d eaten food or was patched up, you know what other people are feeling and how to make them feel better. You’re hardly useless, unimportant, stupid or good for nothing. “

Otsuka stopped. “But you said….”

“I said you weren’t typical. Tsuki,” He uses her childhood nickname to get her attention. “Just because you don’t have a knack for ninja tactics doesn’t mean you don’t deserve to be a Nara.” Shikaku smiled at his cousin. It’s small, but reassuring. He tries not to feel awkward as

his cousin, his sister really, continues to stare at him.

“You really believe that?” Otsuka asks, her voice is more timid than he’s heard her in quite some time. She’d been improving at having her own opinion since Hanayo had died, better at feeling comfortable being who she was, but she was still learning. And Shikaku would always be there to lift Otsuka back up whenever she needed it. Even if he was a little mean about it in the process.

“Yes. I do.” Shikaku stares at the board and still wonders how Otsuka could be quite so bad at Shogi when her mother had spent years trying to teach her strategy. “Now how about we go eat some food?”

Chapter 3

Otsuka moved the knight forward confidently, she was going to win this time! Shikaku just smiled and took her king. “Wha?!” Otsuka gasped, little hands dropping into her lap. “Aw, Shi, how are you so good?” Shikaku just shrugged.

“You aren’t much of a challenge Tsuki.” She gave Shikaku a small glare but cleared the board gently and moved it into the corner. There was a call for dinner and Shikaku and Otsuka started towards the dining room, but Otsuka stopped suddenly, turning to Shikaku in a panic.

“I almost forgot! I was supposed to help grandpa to dinner, oh and Kaa-chan might be home tomorrow, I should clean up after dinner. I don’t think I can spend tonight with you Shi, but I’ll see you at dinner!” Otsuka took off running in the opposite direction and Shikaku sighed. She was high maintenance and naive, but he would still miss the sleepover they had planned. Otsuka always had new random rules she wanted to add to whichever game they played this time. It was fun, even if Shikaku would never admit it.

Shikaku waited while other family members filtered into the room. They only had big family dinners like this once a month, and yet Otsuka would still be late the only night every month she did need to be on time. The dinner room had filled quickly and they were left to wait for Otsuka and her grandfather. The minutes ticked away before the door slid open and revealed the two laughing and conversing. Shikaku felt the need to roll his eyes, Otsuka was so slow getting here and now he really just wanted to eat so he could nap after.

Once they were seated and the feast began, many of the family were discussing the war and Shikaku tried to pay close attention to what they said. He wasn’t about to miss anything that could be vital to him understanding just what was going on outside the compound. It was the sort of mystery he wanted to solve as he watched animosity between certain clans grow.

Besides, the only thing Shikaku had ever wanted to do more than nap was impress his father. Suddenly Shikaku’s father looked over at his son and smiled. “But maybe our younger members might have something to say about that. Shikaku? Otsuka? What would you say to being homeschooled?”

“Homeschooled?! That would be amazing-”

“Otsuka you have to stop and think about these things first. Homeschooling is dangerous, and could put the clan in a very bad position.” What was Otsuka thinking? It was obvious clan relations were in shambles and keeping up appearances in school would help further a bond between clans. “Clan relations and morale have taken a sharp decline, staying in school and making friends will both help to reinforce our allies and gain new ones. Locking our children in the compound achieves the opposite effect. As if we don’t trust anyone.”

The table was silent and Shikaku took this as a go ahead to continue. “Otsuka, if you’d rather stay at home and help bring the village to civil war then staying home might be the appropriate choice.” The last part wasn’t necessary and he knew it, but some very small part of him had wanted to show off. He glanced up to see his father’s harsh glare and he took a moment to glance over at Otsuka.

She was tearing up, she had understood the dressing down for what it was. Of course she had, Shikaku knew she wasn’t stupid, naive but not stupid. For it to be done in front of half the clan was even more humiliating, he felt the guilt bubbling up fast. She politely excused herself from the table before rushing out of the room.

“Shika-” His father started but Otsuka’s grandfather spoke up.

“What is your opinion on Otsuka’s intellect?”

“She’s naive. Otsuka cares about everyone but she has to think her actions through and how they affect others around her. She’s very self oriented.” His voice was quiet. He was ashamed to have let his arrogance lead him on like that. Shikaku knew. He knew what he had said was awful. He was going to apologize the moment he got the chance. He was not going to do something like that ever again.

“I would disagree. If you had let Otsuka finish, you might have understood that staying home from school helps her to have more time to take care of me and the family members around her. She hates leaving me alone. Otsuka might not be good with strategy yet but she loves those around her and every action she makes is meant to help the people around her.”

“Shikaku.” The young boy stilled. He’d never heard his father use such a stern tone with him and it gave him literal chills. He slowly moved to look his father in the eye. When their eyes met his father’s stern look softened. Shikaken could already see that his son was ashamed,

but it was still his job to teach his son lessons.

“You love and care for Otsuka, you should reflect such things in your actions, no matter what you believe to be the logical conclusion. Every opinion matters, I thought I had taught you that. Otsuka still has much to learn and time to grow, like you. But in many respects I think everyone in our clan knows Otsuka will be the shining star one day.” His father held his gaze the entire time he spoke.

Shikaku’s mother softly spoke from across the table. “Why don’t you head to your room to *think things over* .” By the tone of her voice it was not up for discussion and there would be consequences later. He bowed and left the table and half way down the hallway he hesitated. He wanted to talk to Otsuka.

In a few minutes he was outside of Otsuka’s room and could hear her sobbing into what was probably her stuffed bear. He knew it was harsh while he was saying it, but he recognized his outburst as pride. If this was how his pride would affect his family he never wanted to have it again. He did love Otsuka, no matter how blase he tried to act.

He knocks.

There's a shuffle before Otsuka is pulling the screen door open. When she sees him her face goes bright red with anger.

“HOW COULD YOU?!” She threw her stuffed bear at his head and he caught it, holding it out to her again. She held back a sob. “You told everyone….. Now everyone will *know* I’m stupid.” She started crying again and without any prompting she yanked Shikaku into her so she could cry on him as well. They stay there for a few minutes before his cousin calms herself down enough to only have hiccups. She mumbled something into her bear.

“What?”

She yells it this time. “I’M SORRY!” Shikaku takes a stepback.

“Shouldn’t I be apologizing, Otsuka?” He looked off to the side, that was the last time he let anyone cry on him. His eardrums felt like they were bleeding.

She shrugs. Otsuka turns back into her room and starts to close the door, before she fully closes it she peeks out at Shikaku. “Do you think I’m broken?”

“How so?”

“I’m the only not smart Nara.” Otsuka explained but Shikaku shook his head.

“You’re not broken. You’re just a machochist.” Shikaku had to keep himself from snickering at his own joke.

“A mao-chest?” Otsuka opened the door a little more in confusion.

Her cousin sighs. “Every Nara is broken, you’re the only one who isn’t.”

“Huh?” She fully opened the door, as if it would help her better understand. “I don’t get it Shi.” Her cousin scratches the back of his head.

“You will. I didn’t until just now.”

Chapter 4

Otsuka lifted her head and realized she was asleep on Shikaku's couch and she could smell Yoshino cooking in the kitchen. She yawned and pulled herself up before last night's events returned to her.

"Shi?" Otsuka was sprawled across the grass staring into the stars as another deer came up to nudge Shikaku into feeding it more. He was a pushover.

"What?"

"Do you remember all those years ago when we snuck into your father's office and graffitied the wall?" Otsuka shifted to her belly.

"I remember my mother making me do the dishes for the next month." Shikaku glanced over at his cousin and wondered if he should just outright suggest she become a psychologist or just hint at it.

Otsuka rolled her eyes. "Your mother was making you do the dishes because you purposely failed a test." Shikaku only smirked. "That was the only time I can remember your mother praising me for something. I was so worried about your father I didn't even care about the consequences."

Little Otsuka moved quietly around the office, tapping the butterflies to the walls in strategic positions, making sure to work quickly. Of course right when she moved on to taping up the pictures of baby Shikaku was when Shikaku himself walked in. It took almost no work to convince him to help vandalize his father's office. His father's depression was bad enough even his son was willing to risk the wrath of his mother at the chance his father might laugh a little.

Shikaku relented and fed the persistent doe a little more food than necessary.

Otsuka pushed herself up a little and continued. "I've aspired to always do more things like that. I like making people smile, and I realize that's not all there is on the road to helping someone from depression, of course a little graffiti didn't solve your dad's problem on the spot, but even I could notice the changes. Even if it's slow going for everyone knowing I even helped a little bit to get someone to a place where they can be truly happy sounds wonderful." She looked over at Shikaku and gave him a watery smile. "But how can I

help anyone if I'm not really okay myself?" The flood gates opened for the first time since her mother's funeral and Otsuka found herself wrapped in a wordless hug a second later.

She wasn't sure how long she cried but it didn't matter, because every tear freed a little bit of her soul. It brought her a little closer to realizing that it was okay to need people, and it was okay to be overwhelmed. That it was all okay.

"Shikaku, don't tell Minato anything, okay? I'm going to surprise him, show him I want to care about myself." Shikaku smiled.

"It certainly won't be the first thing I tell him about you." His cousin rolled her eyes and dried her cheeks with her hand. She pushed herself up and stared into the sky.

"I'm gonna work at it, while you're gone, that is. I'm gonna work as hard as I can to help myself and then help others." Shikaku was suddenly struck by Otsuka's voice. She turned and gave him a determined smile, one he hadn't seen in years, one he hadn't seen since she decided to make Minato fall in love with her almost three years ago. "And when you get back, you won't even recognize me. Maybe not even Konoha."

It was with some amusement he realized once Otsuka was a psychologist, because there was no way in hell Inoichi would let her do anything else with her talent, Konoha was going to be in for some changes. It seemed the worries of a growing darkness Sarutobi had so kindly finally mentioned to Shikaku was going to be an easier problem to solve than he had initially thought. With Minato as his future Hokage and his cousin's drive to seemingly graffiti everyone into happiness Konoha had a bright future ahead, quite literally.

"Shikaku, come on, Yoshino won't want you to be late for dinner." The man froze and realized they were very late for dinner.

"You better take the fall for this Otsuka." His voice was eerily serious.

"Or what, scared of your wife Shi-kun?" She laughed.

Shikaku gave her a dark smirk. "I'll tell Minato you were the one who stole his kunai so he'd have a reason to come over to the compound."

She gasped and clutched her chest. "You wouldn't!"

"I would."

Otsuka sighed. “Fine, but you try to blackmail me again Shikaku, and I’ll pull out stories you don’t want anyone to know.”

~

“Otsuka darling, do you mind grabbing the rice from the cupboard?” Hanayo, Otsuka’s mother, was recently bound to a wheelchair. She was notified she had about a year left of life, and it was her hope that she could get her daughter to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on others before she died. That was her goal, that last mission she’d hopefully fulfill.

“Otsuka, you should give yourself a break. You know you can rely on others to help your mother, right?” Minato, Otsuka’s boyfriend of a little over a year, had noticed his girlfriend was overworking herself. It didn’t take him long to realize he had no idea how to approach her own mental health with her, and his short discussion with Inoichi and Shikaku had only confused him more. They seemed to understand something he didn’t.

“There’s nothing you can do but support her, actively pulling her away from her mother will only stress her more. She’ll worry she’s wasting precious time.” Inoichi was more worried about Minato than Otsuka at this moment. He had always known that she was struggling, likely because of her mother’s controlling attitude. Otsuka would be in a better position to accept help in a few months, he was sure. But watching Minato worry himself over not being able to help Otsuka himself would just put the two of them in a spiral.

“Minato, are you alright? That cut doesn’t look good at all, did you go to the hospital? Did you-” Otsuka did not understand that Minato didn’t like to be coddled. Well she did, but she often ignored it, she wanted to make sure that the only other pillar in her life was alright. Once she lost her mother she foresaw herself as being useless, but in the process of trying to help she was ignoring his own feelings and wishes.

“Stop worrying so much Inoichi, I have faith in them both.” Shikaku was far too lax about everything. Shikaku seemed to think if he did nothing it would all work itself out eventually because in his book his cousin was the only one he never really needed to give a push in any direction. She’d get there on her own.

~

Minato gritted his teeth as he watched Kumo slaughter his allies. Of course he was stuck here, sworn into staying at his position until the signal went off. He had the sudden urge to move. So move he did, like hell he was gonna watch his friends be killed while he sat back for a plan he was fairly sure had been derailed the moment they realized Kumo had more troops than Konoha had initially suspected.

It was hours later Shikaku found Minato in a medic's tent being chewed out by Tsunade for the wear and tear he was putting his ligaments through. Shikaku listened silently outside the ten waiting for her to finish before he would approach him. Minato looked up to see his long time friend and his eyes and face brightened. "I thought you guys were going to take another month."

Shikaku entered the tent the rest of the way, grunting. "We were pulled in early, We'll finish this cycle before heading back home, instead of waiting a month to cross over."

"How's Otsuka doing?"

"Straight to the point eh?" Shikaku laughed and Minato gave him a shrug.

"I'm worried. Can you blame me?" Minato considered standing, but he dropped the idea when he thought about getting a lecture from Tsunade. Instead he slowly stretched out his legs and unwrapped his leg holster. "She hasn't been great since we moved in, better than before but she's so wrapped up in her mother, she's not even looked for a job yet."

Shikaku nodded. "I have been told under no circumstances am I to tell you she cried for two hours in my arms in the Nara forest at night and, especially not that she spent the night at our house to relax." Minato frowned.

"And you left her alone?" Shikaku rolled his eyes.

"Who do you take me for, Mikoto is keeping an eye on her." He wasn't worried about his cousin. She burned brighter at the thought of helping others, she found her purpose and joy in knowing she was

needed, and he couldn't wait to see what would happen. As long as he didn't have to do any paperwork. He watched Minato look at him a little expectantly before he sighed and handed over Otsuka's letter.

Minato grinned at him and ripped the envelope open.

Dear Minato,

I miss you, the apartment feels empty when it's just me here. Still I've been making do, Mikoto has invited me over for dinner no less than three times this week. I've been going on walks too, mostly the Hokage Mountain. It reminds me of you, our dates, and I enjoy how secluded it is. It makes the hike worth it.

I hope everyone is alright. There's no news from the frontier so far, so I assume things must be okay. Well as okay as things can be at war. Please stay safe, I worry for you. Even when I know you can take care of yourself.

Don't listen to Shikaku. Whatever he says I did or did not do is false! And ask him for the scroll I gave him, and scold him for me too. I know he will do his best to "forget" about them so he may keep them for himself. I made Onigiri for you before he left and it will still be good as long as he arrives in a timely manner. Yoshino has given you permission to smack him if he has already eaten them.

Write back soon,

Forever yours,

Otsuka

Minato does get his Onigiri, but not without a fight.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

TW//: Mentions of suicide

Chapter Notes

Feedback and criticism are always welcomed, I'm still feeling out young Kakashi's character even after writing about five chapters in advance. Also any OC criticism is also welcomed. Finally, I'll stop with all the skipping around at about Chapter 9.

Otsuka sat in one of the Yamanaka's offices while she waited for her interview to start. She had scored the possibility of an apprenticeship from Inoichi, apparently Shikaku had gotten word to his friend instantly and he had set it up right before they left. She wished she could say she was surprised.

A young man entered, clipboard in hand, and he gave his guest a warm smile. Seating himself in his chair behind his desk he uncapped a pen and began to search through the papers on his desk. "Ha, sorry, I'm a little unorganized." He made a space for his clipboard on the desk and then sighed. "Well I don't seem to have the paper anymore." He gave me a sheepish look and shrugged. "My name is Yamanaka Kin, pleasure to meet you Ms.Nara."

The two shook hands. "Inoichi didn't explain much to me besides that I'd be interviewed and then given an apprenticeship." Otsuka gave a half smile.

"Ah yes, usually we don't do just a cursory interview before starting an apprenticeship. We would do something more thorough, except you were recommended, so the whole process should go a lot faster." Kin quickly started to write something down on his clipboard but addressed her anyway. "I have a few questions for you, these are mostly for me because I'll be training you until we deem you capable enough to take your own patients." He looked up only to give Otsuka a reassuring smile and mod before looking back down at what he was furiously writing.

"Oh, well I don't mind answering whatever they're for, I trust you to guide me." She didn't bother to smile at him because he was writing but if he had been looking at her she would have flashed him a

blinding smile.

Kin stopped what he was doing to laugh heartily before making eye contact with Otsuka. “Oh you’ll fit right in Ms. Nara.” His eyes sparkled. “So, your mother died recently, what was that like for you?”

Otsuka got the innate sense this was not a cursory interview, so she acted accordingly and answered the heart of his question to spare him the leading questions. “Hard, this job is my attempt at a way to come to an understanding on how to live life without always taking care of someone. Trying to baby my boyfriend because I’m feeling useless isn’t great.” Admittedly, she shared a bit more than she had intended to. Kin wasn’t here to solve Otsuka’s problems.

“How long have you been dating your boyfriend?”

“Almost three years.”

“How has that been for you?”

Otsuka bit her lip. “There’s a lot of problems, they started a little before I found out that my mother was going to die. That’s also why I’m here. I’m determined to make it work with Minato, and I think this is the best outlet for my need to make sure I’m making a difference through this position.” Her hands were shaking. She could feel the anxiety bubbling again, but she pushed it down to focus on what she was doing. This job was more important.

Kin smiled down at his clipboard. “Remember this isn’t a real interview Mrs.Nara. You don’t need to prove yourself here, you already have.” He looked up and made eye contact with the woman before him. She was perfect, he could see why Inoichi had been so quick to snatch her up. Having a knack for seeing past what people were saying into what they really meant, politically, emotionally, or otherwise was an important skill among ninja. Being so upfront about what was wrong and blunt about her issues in order to help herself would ensure she would do the same for other things she cared about. Hopefully one of those things would become his department. Yes, he was very excited to train her.

Otsuka shrugged and motioned for him to continue on with whatever else he wanted out of her. He obliged. “What do you know of ninja politics?” The question was a little out of left field and caused Otsuka to pause and reconsider the job she was signed up for but pushed it out of her mind. She would figure it out eventually.

“Nothing much, what little I do understand is from Shikaku or Minato and it’s only enough to understand what caused the start of the War and the resource problem we are going to have to address now.” Otsuka furrowed her brow and considered a bit more, she really didn’t know much of anything if she really thought about it, she hadn’t paid any attention until Shikaku had come to dinner one night talking about War. “That’s about it.”

“That’s more than most civilians. Well I’m going to have to get you started on reading up on history as well as the politics between clans and other countries, it’s going to come in handy later, trust me.” Kin put his clipboard down and continued. “Well Mrs. Nara, I’m going to show you around today and send you home with-”

The door was suddenly pushed open with a bang and a middle aged man addressed Kin. “Sorry to interrupt but this is important, we just found out Sakumo Hatake has taken his own life.”

“God” Kin, unfortunately, didn’t look surprised. “Who found him?”

The man sucked in a breath. “His son.”

“Goddamnit.” Kin stood and started towards the door. “Get that kid in here now, I don’t want anyone disturbing him until I say so.” The Yamanaka turned to Otsuka and considered her for a moment before he asked her, “You said Minato Namikaze was your boyfriend? Am I correct in assuming he doesn’t yet have a team?”

She nodded, she knew Sakumo. Not well but he’d come over for dinner to eat with her mother a few times. They were on the same genin team, he’d been at her mother's funeral. “No, why?”

“Well he’s about to have an apprentice, come with me. Looks like we’re gonna start on your training now.”

~

Kin stood outside the door with Otsuka. “The last thing is that it’s incredibly important you ensure you don’t take any political stance whatsoever, got it?” Otsuka glanced at the door to the room in which Kakashi was currently residing and then back to her newly appointed mentor a few times.

“Are you sure I’m the one who should be doing this?” Otsuka was highly skeptical, shoving her into such a delicate situation right now was nowhere near a good idea.

“Unfortunately you’re the only one on our team who Kakashi might know about. His father refused to tell him about his sessions with me and this department isn’t exactly well-known or well-liked.” Kin sighed and ran a hand through his dirty blonde hair. “You’re the best option right now, don’t worry about it too much, you have good instincts and I’m confident that you’ll be a better fit than I would be, and I need to go get the Sandime to approve this sudden decision as quickly as possible.” He gave her a pat on the shoulder and motioned to the door expectantly

Otsuka took a deep breath and slowly opened the door, closing it behind her and giving the small shaking boy in front of her a small smile. She stayed right by the door, Kin had made it clear that she should only approach with his own verbal approval. “Hello Kakashi.” The small boy froze and slowly lifted his head to glare at the unknown woman in front of him. His muscles tightened and Otsuka could see him unconsciously push himself a little further into the couch in an attempt to get away from her.

With no response Otsuka hesitantly decided to continue on, doing her best to keep her legs from shaking. Kin said to be confident or he would ridicule her. “My name is Otsuka, I knew your father.”

Kakashi’s eyes darted up to meet hers and she could read the desperate hope in his eyes that was soon clouded over by anger. “Did you?” His words were accusatory but Otsuka didn’t pay it any attention.

“Yes, not well, but I knew him. He was on a genin team with my mother, he might have told you, her name was Hanayo Nara.” She watched some small recognition flicker through his face before he set his jaw and his tiny fists curled into balls tight enough Otsuka suspected he had drawn blood.

“I’ve never met you before.” Kakashi glared at her harder, if that was possible. “What do you want?”

Otsuka let her smile go and calmed herself, she didn’t want what she was about to say come across as pity. “To see if I can help you-”

“I don’t need help!” Kakashi insisted. He stood and looked about ready to pounce on her.

Otsuka clearly understood that for a wrong move on her part. Anxiety bubbled up for a moment before the innate need to help took over. “May I tell you a story?” Kakashi was taken aback, he seemed to calm only a touch before his anger returned.

“I am NOT a baby.” He growled.

“No, it’s not a baby story, it’s a story about my own father. He died when I was six, you’re six right?” Kakashi didn’t respond and instead looked away. Otsuka decided it was best to continue now that his anger had somewhat faded. “He was always really kind and gave me chocolates behind my mother’s back. One day my mother came home crying, she told me that my father wasn’t coming home. After that I wouldn’t let anyone I cared about out of my sight. I practically dragged my uncle back into the house when he was leaving early for a mission. I was terrified that they would all die. It was soon after that I realized that I did not want to be a ninja, because I wanted to be there for people who were just as scared as me, that the people they love won’t come home.” She paused looking at the tiny boy in front of her to see if she could discern if he was listening or not.

Kakashi glanced at Otsuka before realizing she was staring at him and he glanced away. There was a long pause. “G-go on.” Kakashi folded his arms around himself and seated himself on the couch but Otsuka didn’t move.

“You’re gonna go be a ninja, and while I didn’t know your father well, he was like my mother’s brother. Well a lot of my friends say being on a genin team makes you family, and well, it’s only right that I take care of my nephew huh? I’m not going to go anywhere, I won’t leave you behind no matter what, it’s a promise!” Otsuka gave him a smile and tentatively reached out her hand.

Kakashi looked at her with an emotion she couldn’t quite place. Slowly he reached out and grasped her hand pulling it over to the couch. “You really promise?” He said as they slowly moved.

“I do.” Otsuka seated herself next to him and ignored when his grasp around her hand got tighter. “Kakashi, may I call you that? I should have asked first huh?” The boy nodded and scooted a little closer.

“Well there are some people who would like to talk to you. They have questions about your father. I can’t promise all of them will be nice or won't treat you like a kid, but I’ll be there. If you get angry or sad or scared all you have to do is squeeze my hand okay, squeeze it as hard

as possible and I'll take over." Otsuka realized it had probably been a while and the police force would be hounding Kin to speak to Kakashi.

"Right now?" His voice was timid and conveyed everything Otsuka needed to know to come to a decision. Police force be damned, she was going to make sure Kakashi would never have to feel alone and distraught like that again.

"Whenever you're ready, and not a moment before." Kakashi looked up at Otsuka with wide eyes. She smiled.

"Oh, okay." With that he hugged her and began to cry his heart out.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

TW//: Mentions of suicide

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was decided that for the time being Kakashi would be under Otsuka's care, Kin saw to that the instant he found out, seeking out the Hokage and having him sign the documents before anyone could get any funny ideas about the Hatake child. It was of course only until Danzo started to make a scene and by then Kin hoped to have the Hokage on his side of the argument and ensure Minato would apprentice Kakashi. It certainly wasn't the biggest risk he'd taken in his few short years as one of the head phycologists.

That was what led to Otsuka packing up Minato's office and clearing space for a bed so Kakashi could have his own room when he was ready to stop sleeping with her. He hadn't really let her out of his sight for more than the few minutes it took her to shower, right now he was searching the small library Minato had made for himself along the opposite wall, he seemed to be interested in almost every piece of information Minato had to offer. Otsuka has told him not to do anything more than read them for as long as Minato was away, she had no clue what was in those scrolls and books but she'd watched Minato talk about theory for hours. There was no way a six-year-old was ready to tackle that all on his own.

She'd already written her boyfriend a letter explaining the situation and asking for guidance in terms of how to tell when the small boy was overworking himself or what was too advanced but she wouldn't be able to send it until Fugaku, Minato's close friend, left to go join him out in the field. There weren't many people she could go ask, in fact she wasn't even sure who would have experience with raising a child who was a little too eager to learn everything.

Kin had told her to just watch him closely when he finally started training again and maybe have someone she knew watch over his training until he graduated in a month. That was another thing, apparently someone had approved fast tracking Kakashi's learning and Otsuka desperately wanted to do something about that. She was 100%

certain having a six-year-old genin out in war was a bad idea. She had asked Kin about what she could do about it and the man had only smiled at her and said something about her needing to get a hold of Kakashi's paperwork. Otsuka had made up her mind to go to the academy tomorrow.

"Otsuka?"

"Yes Kakashi?" Otsuka had finally put away everything on and in Minato's desk and was ready to move it to the side. She figured Minato and her would figure something out later.

"Isn't Minato-san going to train me? Because I don't see why I couldn't get started on practicing now so I can impress him." Otsuka held back a long sigh. She was going to have to figure something out for him quickly. It wasn't the first time she found herself desperately wishing Minato was here to help, most of the time she felt like she couldn't understand what it was like for Kakashi at all and that Minato would have slipped into a caregiver role easily.

"We've talked about this. I don't want you to do anything more than read it, I can't imagine any of it's safe to learn on your own, and I can't understand why you're in such a rush to become a genin." Kakashi glared at her and left the room. It was almost like he was already a teen. She dearly wished she had someone who had some experience in this she could go to.

There was a knock at the door and she heard Kakashi open the door. "Hello Kakashi-kun." Came an older sounding voice. "Is Otsuka Nara here? I was hoping to have a discussion with her." Otsuka placed her box down and headed into the living room.

"Yes sir, to what do we owe the pleasure?" Otsuka held out her hand and smiled at the man she recognized as Danzo Shimura. She was pretty sure he was an elder who often helped out the Hokage but she didn't know more than that, if he was visiting he must have come to help with Kakashi's schooling. Perfect timing.

"Ah, I'm here to discuss some options for Kakashi." She knew it. This was wonderful, it made her life so much simpler.

"Wonderful, please come in and have a seat. Can I get you any tea?" Otsuka closed the door behind him and he shook his head but looked around the room a little strangely. She ignored it and sat down across from Danzo at the table.

“Do you know who I am?” Danzo asked, almost carefully. Kakashi moved to sit next to his caretaker.

“Yes, you’re one of Konoha’s elders, correct?” Danzo smiled.

“Indeed, I’ve come to inquire about Kakashi’s schooling. It is my understanding you have no ninja background.” Otsuka nodded. “Well I of course have Kakashi’s best interest in mind and I have an offer.” After Danzo finished the sentence he shifted and Otsuka could see some strange emotion flicker through his eyes.

“What offer?” Kakshi leaned forward intrigued.

“Well, I’d like to take Kakashi under my own wing and train him myself, he’d of course come live with me so I could ensure he is well looked after and focused.” In the middle of Danzo’s pitch the man began to shift more and more. “We have a program that would move him quickly up the ranks so that he could be ANBU before you know it.” It became clear to Otsuka she was not the one this pitch was for and a slight uneasy feeling started to grow but she pushed it away.

“ANBU?” Otsuka inquired, she’d heard it a few times but she was sure she must be wrong because Kakashi was only six and there was no way Danzo could be suggesting something like what she thought ANBU was.

“Ah, it’s a highly regarded position. Kakshi would be able to reach this goal in only a few years if he worked hard enough and before he knew it, he'd be one of Konoha’s best operatives. I really believe Kakashi’s training should be under a trained ninja.” Danzo looked to be sweating now. Otsuka’s eyes happened to flicker up and she felt her stomach drop. The seal above her couch was glowing brighter and brighter slowly.

“Why exactly did you need my blood?” Otsuka asked when Minato had finished making his ink and had begun to continue to paint a seal along the wall.

“I’m adding you into the seal I’m putting up. Since I just moved in I figured there was no better time to try my hand at the more advanced seals.” Minato’s hair was up and he was standing atop a chair slowly adding on brush strokes to his partial seal. “In theory it will activate any time someone comes in with bad intentions for the apartment's occupants. It should slowly become more and more painful for them to stay.”

Otsuka bit her lip. “But I don’t live here.” Minato stopped and turned to

look at his girlfriend. He gave her a large smile.

"I'd rather make sure you're safe. It should apply to anyone who the occupants care for but I'd rather take the extra precaution with you."

Otsuka stood abruptly, startling Kakashi. "I can tell how much you care Danzo-sama! Unfortunately Kakashi and I have an appointment to make soon." She half forcefully, half kindly pulled Danzo up and led him to the door, rather unexpectedly. "Thank you for the offer, really Kakashi and I will discuss it in length and get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you for the visit!" It was with that she slammed the door in Danzo's shocked looking face.

Otsuka turned to see Kakashi looking at her with hurt, anger, and confusion. She pointed towards the seal which was slowly fading from the wall. "Kakashi, I don't know why but I have an awful feeling about that man and clearly Minato's seal does too. Promise you won't accept anything he offers you."

"But-!"Kakashi started to protest.

"Promise me Kakashi. If you do that, I'll do everything in my power to see to it Minato teaches you every single piece of information on that bookshelf. Just promise me you won't go near him." Otsuka looked as desperate as she felt.

Kakashi looked a little offended but when he stared into his self-proclaimed aunts eyes he saw worry and fear. He wasn't going to let someone he'd only just let into his life go so quickly. "I promise."

Otsuka pulled Kakashi into her arms before taking him out to head towards the Uchiha Compound. She was getting that letter to Minato and she had a feeling Fugaku and Mikoto were the only two who could help her right now.

~

Kakashi was training outside, he'd been out there for hours. Otsuka knew she should ask him to take a break but she feared he'd get upset at her. The Nara supposed it didn't really matter if he was upset; she needed to put his best interest first. Still she weighed the options she had before her and finally decided to call him in. Maybe she could get away with it if she said she was interested in spending time with him.

She pushed the window open and called down to him from the second story. Minato had insisted he find an apartment in a ninja complex.

She never really understood why but the backyard training ground was convenient. “Kakashi, come in, why don’t you and I do something?”

Kakashi paused and looked up. He didn’t look as though he wanted to do anything but train. “Once I’m done training!” He called back.

“How long will that take?” Kakashi turned to look at the sun.

“About an hour to an hour and a half.” His guardian checked the time herself and wondered if she should insist he come in now, he’d been going at it for five hours, it just couldn’t be good for a boy that young. However, Kakashi might see training as a way to forget about everything else. Otsuka dearly wished there was a class for parenting.

“How about just 45 minutes?” She watched Kakashi’s form but he didn’t respond. He was probably thinking it over. “If you come in and shower once you’re done, I’ll take you out to dinner and after we can stop at the night market and look for things to decorate your room.”

“I’ll be up in 45!” Kakashi’s called out after a few moments. Otsuka smiled, she was glad he wanted to hang out with her. She glanced around the house and decided she’d clean a bit before getting ready in something nice. She paused and wondered if Kakashi had any dressy clothing. Well it would just be another outing she could use to get him to stop training if so.

In an hour the two were out the door and headed towards dinner. As they walked Otsuka felt uncomfortable, she could feel stares directed at her and Kakashi. The further they walked the more stares she could feel, she even caught a few glares but they weren’t glaring at her. They were glaring at Kakashi. But why?

She did her best to shield Kakashi from the glares by smiling and talking loudly about how strong she thought Kakashi was for his age. To Kakashi’s credit, he began to blush the louder she got. He was excited to hear her praise him, even if she wasn’t a ninja.

By the time they arrived at the restaurant Otsuka’s blood was boiling, she had seen enough in their walk to know this had been going on for a while. She resigned herself to handling the problem later. For now, she would enjoy her time with Kakashi.

They sat and ordered food before Kakashi began pestering Otsuka with questions. “Otsuka, do you think Minato-san will teach me Hirashin? Or maybe Fuinjutsu?” Otsuka just laughed. "Is Minato-san

good at kenjutsu?"

"Well Kakashi, to be honest I don't know how to explain much of Mintao's ninja prowess besides what it is exactly, he knows, but we used to spend hours talking about how time works. He always said he needed new ways of thinking about the world when working on Finjutsu and we would spout off different theories of how maybe time doesn't move but we move through time and yadda yadda."

Kakashi's eyebrows furrowed and he seemed to be trying to make sense of something. "So then Finjutsu is just applying different rules to the world around you?"

Otsuka shrugged. "I just came up with some weird ideas, I don't actually know how Finjutsu works. Minato will have to help you with that. Are you interested in learning Finjutsu?"

Kakashi seemed to think it over before hesitantly nodding. "If it can really be used to change basic rules then it would be very important to know more about it before I decided not to study it."

Otsuka had to hide a smile at how thoughtful the young boy was, he was basically already a Nara. The woman briefly wondered if she'd be able to sign Kakashi to be under the Nara' care without changing his last name. She'd look into it later. "That sounds like a good idea. Kakashi what do you think of going clothes shopping tomorrow?"

The young boy shook his head. "I have enough clothes, besides I will need new genin clothes later this year."

Maybe it was just Otsuka but she was sure she'd only ever seen the same four shirts. She was sure that he had to have more, there was no way Sakumo wouldn't give him clothing, especially because their clan was so small wearing something with the Hatake symbol on it would be essential. It was a thought she put aside at the arrival of their food.

"Well, if you tell me what you expect you'll need as a genin now I can look at getting something handmade. If I mention it's for Minato I'm sure we could get some pieces that are a little above a new genin's level." Otsuka couldn't help the happiness that filled her when she watched Kakashi come alight.

~

Fugaku arrived faster than he had expected, it wasn't because he had left earlier but rather he found himself wanting to find his best friend

and deliver Otsuka's letter quickly. If Danzo was making moves on Kakashi so openly, then he would certainly take advantage of Fugaku's absence to make moves on the Uchiha's territory. Minato himself had to convince him to even leave purely because Danzo would rather Fugaku stay and claim he was the only clan head who hadn't left.

He met with the commander first, Shikai Nara, before seeking out Minato. He found the man going over plans with some ninja he didn't recognize, he almost decided to wait patiently, almost.

"Minato, I have urgent news." Fugaku held up the letter and did his best to convey the need for speed with a glare. If they did this quickly enough they could send back a letter before the ninja he came to replace were sent back in the next hour. Minato rolled his eyes but excused himself anyway with a smile before settling an annoyed look upon Fugaku.

"What was so urgent?"

"Otsuka sent a letter and I have the details for some concerning news." Fugaku held the letter out and Minato's eyes lit up.

"As much as I love Otsuka, this isn't urgent." Minato betrayed his own words, ripping the letter open and Fugaku rolled his eyes at the love sick puppy in front of him. He found himself a little sorry the letter wasn't good news.

Minato,

I went and got myself a job but in the process we seem to have become psuedo-parents. Sakumo Hatake was discovered dead in his own home a few days ago, probably two weeks' time for you, he killed himself leaving little Kakashi all alone. Kin, my boss, has decided you're going to be the boy's jonin teacher whenever you get back. Surprise? I know you've wanted to be a teacher for a while so I'm glad to at least give you some good news.

Still, Kakashi is only six and fast tracked to graduate in a month. He's been looking through your library and I've kept him from doing anything more than reading it but I have no idea how to supervise his training or do anything more than keep him well fed. He's moved into your office for the time being. What should I do exactly? I need to keep him busy but I'm worried that not only is he far too young to become a genin during war time but also will hurt himself without you here.

Fugaku watched Minato's face contort into confusion and surprise. He stopped reading for a moment to look at Fugaku questioningly. The Uchiha motioned for him to continue, if he wasn't angry yet, he clearly hadn't read the entire letter.

Today I was approached by Danzo-sama, I don't know much about him but from the face Fugaku gave when I asked I'm glad I went to him to inquire. He came to our house earlier today, he came offering to watch over Kakashi's training and take care of the boy himself. I was intrigued at first before that seal thingy you did in the living room started to go off and I ushered him out on the spot.

Furthermore, every time I go out with Kakashi people glare and whisper some of the worst things I've ever heard. I've done my best to scare them off and try to keep Kakashi from noticing but he's almost a genin, I'm sure he knows exactly what I'm doing. I have no clue what's going on but I'm very worried about Kakashi. I'm going to see what I can learn from my boss because he seems to understand what's going on, but I'd much rather hear from you.

I know you're busy but I sent along some of your sealing paper, ink, and some extra food. I know the rations are bland and I figured some food for you and the boys might cheer you all up. Don't go getting yourself killed, otherwise I'll have to resort to drastic measures to bring you back.

Love,

O.N.

P.S. I love you, stay safe.

Minato snatched up some paper from the table in his tent and started to write furiously. "When do the people you replaced leave?"

"You have about an hour and a half. I asked them to stay longer." Fugaku responds, moving to watch his friend write. "Danzo has been trying to approach Kakashi without Otsuka there since she wrote the letter. In addition, he's been making moves to nullify Otsuka's custody but he'll have a bit of a hard time fighting it because Otsuka's mother was on Hatake's team. None of the ninja will see a problem with it at first." Minato nodded to indicate he was listening.

Fugaku read over his shoulder to make sure nothing was forgotten. The letter was half way done when Minato stopped to ask for his ink and sealing paper, apparently he was going to draw up something on the spot. "And how exactly is your *civilian* girlfriend going to know

how to activate a seal?" Minato paused for a split second before pushing the sealing paper out a bit further and extending his line.

"I'll write for her to have Mikoto or Yoshino put it up, they're probably the only people she'll trust to do it anyhow." Minato explained and he went back to studiously working. By the end of the hour, both the letter and seal were finished and being placed into the returning ninja's hands.

My dear,

I can only hope this arrives to you before you are approached by someone again. I have enclosed a seal, to be placed above our door. It will prevent anyone without permission from entering. Mikoto will be able to help you set it up, or even ask your grandfather or Yoshino. It's simple and easy to understand while hard to break through. Apply your own blood to make you the primary holder and then mix your blood and theirs to allow anyone else inside.

Be wary of anyone else who might approach you, Kakashi is in danger if he has attracted certain people's attention. Don't trust anyone except our friends and stay on the lookout.

I'm sorry I cannot write more. I love you, more than life itself.

I send you my heart

For I am eternally yours,

Minato

Chapter End Notes

> Ya'll I just wanna be at Chapter 10 already so you can really see what I have planned. For now I'm building up background pieces that will help flesh out the plot

Chapter 7

Exactly a month after Otsuka had received Minato's first letter she found herself seated in a conference with Kakashi, Danzo, and the academy's director; Taiken. Kin was supposed to join them as Kakashi's official psychologist but it seemed the man was late. Otsuka was aware the man was overworked with Inoichi gone and the war starting, she'd been spending over 15 hours following him around to note take, learn, and help out practically every day. She even sat in on a few of his appointments, but only if the patient allowed. Still, she hadn't slept much before the meeting and she was new to this whole double meaning speech.

Danzo gave the young woman in front of him a grave smile. He'd been doing this for years, she might have helped, but he was certain he'd come out on top after this meeting. "Well, it's quite clear Kin Yamanaka didn't care enough to show, why don't we get started." He turned to Taiken to make sure the chunin approved.

"Ah, yes we should get started soon." Taiken agreed, he gave Otsuka a smile and Kakashi a small nod. He didn't know either well, but Kakashi Hatake was rather infamous and he'd been in touch with Otsuka enough the past few weeks to be well acquainted with her.

"Good, why don't we start by addressing the reason we're here. Otsuka would like to move back Kakashi's graduation, but I have been seeking him as an apprentice and I believe holding him back will do him more harm than good. Of course we know you have Kakashi's best interest in mind, but Taiken was explaining to me earlier the academy has nothing more to offer Kakashi." Danzo took control.

As the elder started to run with his course Otsuka felt worry start to bubble up. The way he was running wasn't leaving her any room to speak up. Usually she'd just call him out but to do so in front of Taiken wouldn't be incredibly disrespectful and would only push Taiken to dislike her. If she wanted her way she needed Taiken on her side.

"Taiken, you were telling me the boy has expressed to his teachers he wants new materials?" The director nodded. "Otsuka, unfortunately if we leave Kakashi in the academy he might go seeking the information in an unsupervised environment. If he were to come with me he would not only have that supervision but-" Otsuka cut Danzo off.

“Forgive me, I simply realized, we should ask Kakashi what he wants.” Danzo pressed his lips into a line at the disrespect but swallowed down any retort. He needed to seem like the polite one, this would ultimately work in his favor. He could see the surprise in Taiken’s eyes at the interruption.

“Kakashi-kun” Otsuka continued, she had the floor now and she couldn’t let Danzo ask Kakashi any questions. That much Kin had made sure to tell her. “What do you want?”

All eyes were on Kakashi. His eyes flickered from person to person, lingering on his aunt’s eyes. “I’d like to be a Genin, soon.” His eyes flickered back to Otsuka’s face but she didn’t seem angry. Danzo’s face, however, was looking at him with greed and pleasure. It unnerved him.

“See, even Kakashi thinks holding him back is-”

“Oh!” Otsuka stood abruptly and looked down at the tea cup she’d ‘accidentally’ broken. “I wasn’t paying attention when I put the cup down, where’s the mop? I’ll clean it up right away-”

Taiken was up instantly. “It’s alright Otsuka-san, I’ll be right back with a broom and cloth.” Taiken smiled and practically ran out the door.

Danzo held back the urge to growl, that damned woman had done that on purpose. Her face of embarrassment was believable enough but Danzo was sure of it. Taiken reappeared and Otsuka bent to help him clean. After the broken cup was put into the trash and the leftover tea cleaned, Otsuka started to talk again.

“Really, I am so sorry to have interrupted you Danzo-sama. Taiken-san please remind me to replace the cup before I leave.”

Taiken waved it away. “It’s totally alright, they’re not expensive anyway.” Just like that Otsuka had interrupted Danzo and was back in Taiken’s favor. She wished she could say she’d had a better plan than breaking a tea cup to interrupt Danzo, but since it was the only other interruption she had thought of, she was on edge.

“Back to Kakashi” Otsuka smiled. “There are types of ninja right? What type do you want to be?” Kakashi seemed to brighten at the topic change.

“I want to master sealing.” That was not the answer anyone had expected from Kakashi, the six-year-old who judged talent by power

and wanted nothing more than to be seen as an adult.

Danzo's eye widened and Taiken looked totally taken off guard. Otsuka took the moment before Danzo could say anything. "Well, then apprenticing under Minato is probably a good idea, any time he's home the man is on the floor coming up with new ideas. He's not a master yet but he's close." She looked at Taiken. "I must confess, I don't know much about ninja but as soon as I told Minato about Kakashi he was ecstatic about teaching someone."

She was right of course but he'd been more focused on keeping Danzo firmly away from his girlfriend. "He sent me a letter just for you Taiken, Kakashi should be graduating within the next few days but it has some suggestions with Kakashi in mind specifically." Otsuka produced the letter and held it out towards Taiken. The man took it and was surprised at how thick the envelope was.

He read through the small letter and then realized the rest was information about sealing that would help the academy teachers with planning the lessons Minato had set out for Kakashi. "Well, it seems Namikaze-san has written out what Kakashi needs to be taught for the next two months before he returns, it looks to be mostly calligraphy work that the teachers will have to look over. He suggests Kakashi at least sit out the rest of the term with the class his age to promote friendship and make sure Kakashi doesn't end up too secluded from his future comrades." Taiken looked genuinely surprised and convinced by the letter.

"It sounds as if Minato has already thought of everything, and in order for him to become a sealing Master he must train someone so he believes this to be the perfect opportunity to ensure Konoha gains another sealing master and has another master on the way." Danzo couldn't argue with the logic of giving Konoha another sealing master and Minato knew it. It was exactly why the man had written the letter to Taiken himself and not the Hokage. "Well, it seems it's decided then. Obviously we must ensure that Konoha gains a sealing master." Taiken smiled at Kakashi, a genuine smile that took Kakashi by surprise. "I'll see which class it would disturb least to have you sit in and have the information for you by tomorrow Otsuka-san."

Otsuka gave him a blinding smile. "Oh, please call me Otsuka, we've talked so much and I'm sure we'll be in contact for a while. Minato filled me in on what he is supposed to do at home but I have some questions regarding how to make sure he's not over working himself. Questions I could never bother Danzo-sama with because they're so

trivial." Danzo actually frowned at her and the heat of his stare only brought the woman more anxiety but she held herself together.

The meeting ended soon after and Kakashi and Otsuka headed home. Kakashi disappeared to his room before calling out he was going to go training and leaving the house. Otsuka didn't try to stop him, instead seating herself at the kitchen counter.

Suddenly everything felt overwhelming and a pressure built behind her eyes. She'd been thrown into a small part of the life of a ninja. Mikoto had been over every day to help her manage Kakashi and study all of the documents. Slowly she'd realized what she felt were flaws in the system.

For one it didn't make any sense that clan children were in the same class as civilian children. Civilian kids would need to learn more in a faster time than clan kids and thus should be put into an advanced program because as it was it seemed like Konoha produced about two clan kids each year to become team genin, the rest were stuck in the genin corps. When she mentioned it to Mikoto the Uchiha explained that civilian parents would be in an uproar because ultimately, no matter the intent, the civilian kids would fall behind by leagues. The bias would send the best teachers to the clan kids class and before you know it all the resources would be in those classes too.

And two, why was it that Konoha seemed to always lie to civilians, she knew more than most civilians, but up until a few weeks ago she had operated under the assumption that Danzo was one of Konoha's greatest leaders.

There was something exciting about a great undertaking, like her new job, but to suddenly support a traumatized child and now discovering the reality of the world she lived in. She felt stupid. Angry. Utterly useless. In that moment every emotion in her screamed to be let out, she couldn't control any of her feelings or make sense of what she was facing.

In an instant she ripped her purse off the counter and flung it at the wall, the stool she was previously seated on was kicked across the room. Seconds later she was upending a drawer of utensils and smashing ceramic bowls and plates. She slammed the oven door over and over. Otsuka reached out and hurled the frame atop the stove across the room. It hit the far wall and shattered, the frame broken and glass littered the living room carpet.

The moment the picture hit the wall she broke inside. She collapsed amongst the pieces of ceramic and tears flowed.

~

Otsuka frowned at her cabinets, she'd managed to break almost all of her plates and bowls, it left her with the three dishes in the sink from a dinner with Mikoto and Kakashi last night and one still in the cabinet. She didn't regret her actions, it had been a wonderful release, and now she knew that she had to find a proper outlet for these feelings.

Still Otsuka now needed to go out and replace everything she'd broken. Including the picture frame Minato had bought her for their first anniversary. It was a picture of the two of them atop Hokage mountain. The man loved it up there and it was his favorite picture, he'd almost taken it with him but he'd decided against it because he'd have had to fold it.

Otsuka honestly didn't care, she wasn't one for pictures. They were only snippets of a larger experience, they didn't tell the entire story of someone. Maybe it gave an insight into someone's mind but it would never tell you everything. Common sayings be damned.

The most troublesome thing would be replacing the frame. Minato would notice right away, whereas she could get away with replacing the dishes, she'd been complaining about them anyway. She was pretty sure he'd sealed the back of the picture but left the frame because he had yet to 'fully understand' carved seals. She'd just laughed at him for being so protective of a picture frame.

Otsuka turned and stared at the picture she'd placed on the counter. There wasn't much she could do, her best bet was to cover it up by ordering a handmade frame. She'd call it a gift and then it would be unlikely he'd call her out on the lie. She placed the picture in a drawer and checked the time. It was Sunday so she didn't need to go to work for another three hours. Perfect time to go shopping for everything and buy some clothes for Kakashi. It was decided.

"Kakashi!" She called out. "Come get yourself cleaned up, we're going shopping." Otsuka could hear him groan from outside, she only laughed.

~

Danzo Shimura read over the report one of his Root ninja had just

brought back, Kakashi Hatake was an important piece on the board. The moment he realized that he'd started to push Sakumo Hatake towards death, he was determined to nab the small child. Danzo needed Root to grow and grow quickly. With the start of the war his own personal troops were spread thin, he couldn't control as much of the board as he had previously assumed he'd be able to.

Danzo had severely underestimated the impact Konoha's lack of jinchuriki would have on the war. He'd done his best to mitigate the damage Sarutobi had done by letting the jinchuriki return to Uzu in the past tenish years but clearly he hadn't done it as well as he had thought.

The captured Uzumaki's both Iwa and Kumo had been presenting a large issue even with Uzu sending some reinforcements. Kushina was not nearly as well trained as she might have been had she stayed in Konoha. Sarutobi had damned Konoha to fight a long war, and if Danzo didn't do something quickly he was sure it would drag on until Konoha was in ruins.

"Rat!" The ANBU appeared in front of him. "Find me some missing nin, I don't want Otsuka Nara alive when The Yellow Flash returns."

Chapter 8

Kin passed Otsuka the folder. “Make sure you read the entire thing before you go into the session. Thank you so much for agreeing to handle this for me, I can’t afford to miss the clan head meeting; Inoichi would kill me.” His eyes flickered over the room and fell on the desk. He reached forward to grab the stack of papers Otsuka had written up for him. “See you later, tell me how it goes!” With that Kin was out the door.

Setting the folder he’d handed her to the side, Otsuka sighed. She was going to handle his three sessions today; she was terrified. She’d practiced on others before but every time Kin had been there. She noticed an anxiety was building up in her chest but she did her best to ignore it.

She failed and she found herself collapsing into Kin’s chair hyperventilating. Her breathing quickened, a pain blossomed in her chest, her vision darkened as she sank deeper into her panic attack. How on earth was she supposed to be ready for this level of work. She didn’t have nearly enough experience for this. She spiraled for a minute but something inside her snapped her from the panic attack rather suddenly.

She looked up to see a small bird tapping the window. It was minding its own business for the most part, simply exploring. Otsuka heard her mother's chastising words flow through her head and she cringed. She was wasting precious time that she needed to prepare. Anxiety could come later.

First she cleaned up Kin’s desk and sorted through some of his files and paperwork; the man could not seem to keep anything clean. After she'd finished tidying she headed over to the office he had his appointments in. It was a large space with muted blues and light browns, a few pictures and a couch for the patient to sit on. She seated herself across from the couch in Kin’s usual chair. Pulling out her pen she started to go through the first file in the folder she began to read through the profile Kin had set up for her. He’d put together a few pages of things she might need to refer to quickly for all three patients.

The first patient was someone she’d met before, Matsusuke Akimichi. He was a retired shinobi who’d lost an arm on a mission four years ago. He’d been able to come to terms with a lot of his trauma but felt

it was important to continue his sessions in order to stay on top of his feelings. He was kind and hadn't minded Otsuka sitting in at all, he said he hoped to be one of Otsuka's first official patients, he'd commented on how taking up Kin's time prevented him from other patients who probably needed to see Konoha's best psychiatrist. Kin had of course denied that fact, he cared very much about all of his patients, but Otsuka had personally seen the backlog of patients who, despite not wanting to come, desperately needed to.

Otsuka supposed that was why Kin had been pushing her so far so fast, the past two and a half months of work were all focused on catching Otsuka up to speed so they'd finally have ten psychiatrists. With a population of over 80,000 people it was outrageous, Konoha hadn't had much peace time in its entire lifetime, thus it was always mostly war oriented and things like mental health fell behind, especially since Hiruzen had come to power. Between Danzo and Hiruzen they focused almost solely on war and negotiations, and with Danzo's actions he'd managed to cut a force of over 70 psychiatrist's to 10 in six years. Everyone was overworked and it was why Otsuka had only had two days off in the time since she had gotten her job and began to pull 14 to 18 hour days each day.

Kakashi had commented on her dwindling free time and short temper; she'd always apologized for each snarky remark, but she knew the young boy was starting to feel lonely and neglected himself. Honestly Otsuka wasn't sure how to make time for him. She just knew she would do it no matter what it took. She refused to fail Kakashi, not like she'd failed her mother.

She paused, wondering where that thought had come from but pushed it away as the door began to open. She'd reflect on it later.

"Hello Otsuka-san, Kin told me you might be the person running today's session." Matsusuke smiled, seating himself on the couch.

Otsuka smiled back. "Yes, he's at the clan head meeting right now. Please excuse me in advance. This is my first official session without someone else here." The Akimichi waved it away and continued to smile. "Well let's get started, how was your week?"

Matsusuke started to talk about his youngest son's schooling and his wife's constant worrying about their oldest children, twins, who were currently in the war. Then he frowned. "Actually we were supposed to receive letters from their regiment early today, I shouldn't worry about it really, sometimes they get delayed. Their mother's just

rubbing off on me." Masusuke laughed but she could tell he was doing it more for her than anything else.

A small pit settled in her stomach as she realized she was fairly sure Minato was in the same regiment as Matsusuke's twins but it wasn't important at the moment. "Gomen Matsusuke-san, could we go back to your oldest sons? Mou and Moki correct? Tell me about them."

Masusuke sighed and rubbed his neck. "Caught me huh? Guess I should have known, well they're both primarily ninjutsu users, that means they-"

Otsuka interrupted, waving her hands. "Oh no, I'm aware please don't feel any need to explain anything, plus if I have any questions about ninjustu Kakashi loves to answer them in depth."

"Ah" Matsusume looked surprised and stopped to glance over Otsuka before sighing. "I suppose I should've known that too." Otsuka gave him a questioning look but the man just continued on about his children as Otsuka asked questions to lead him to the root of the problem.

"So you trust your children's abilities?"

Matsusume nodded. "Of course I do, I just see too much of myself in them. I don't want them to be forced into retirement, Mou could never handle it and Moki would be devastated. If they have to go through what I did, I've failed as a father."

His temporary psychiatrist cocked her head to the side. "How so?"

"Well I should have trained them better, it's my responsibility to keep them alive and safe."

"But you weren't their sensei, nor are they children anymore, Matsusume." The man nodded again. Otsuka decided to try a different approach. "Excuse the change of topic but do you cook or does your wife?"

His eyebrows furrowed but he answered. "My wife cooks."

"Mm, is she a good cook?"

"Wonderful!" Matsusume's face lit up.

"I'm sure, but every meal is good?"

The man nodded profusely. “Her cooking is heaven.” The awe and love dripped from his voice.

“So, tell me, did she teach any of your children to cook?” Otsuka praised herself for remembering him bringing up the piece of information a week ago. She was getting better at this.

“All of them. She wanted to make sure they could cook a meal out on the field and always have a reminder of home.”

“And if they mess up a meal, has their mother then failed them?” Matsusume stopped and considered.

“I suppose she hasn’t.” Then understanding dawned in his face. “And you’re saying I haven’t failed my children either.”

Otsuka shook her head. “I said no such thing.” The woman struggled to suppress a smile, it felt so good to succeed in helping someone.

Matsusume grinned at her. “Kin really has taught you well.” He paused and looked off to the side. “I have taught them well too, I should just focus on being proud and supporting them.” His eyes met hers and filled with gratitude. He glanced at the time and realized they’d gone a few minutes over his normal 45 minutes and stood.

“It was good to see you today Matsusume, I hope you get those letters today.” She smiled. The man looked at her for a few seconds before coming to a decision.

“I should tell you Otsuka-san, you need to be careful of who you tell that you’re taking care of Kakashi. There are some rumors going around.” Otsuka froze in her seat, it was clear he was trying to get something across that she didn’t fully understand.

She took a breath and met his eyes, they looked worried. “Rumors huh? Well I’ll get on fixing them. Thank you Matsusume-san.” The man nodded.

“Akimichi and Nara stick together after all.” He closed the doors and Otsuka absentmindedly wondered what exactly the rumors meant. She’d ask Mikoto of Kin next time she saw them, though she knew Mikoto would give her a straight answer. She wrote down some notes about Masusume and then paused.

Failed her mother huh? Did she really feel like she didn’t do enough for her mother? She’d poured all of her life into her mother, been at

her beck and call until half a year ago. She didn't have a life because she wanted to be there for her mother.

Maybe it was time to let go of some of her mother's teachings. She'd think about it further once she was home.

~

Otsuka struggled to unlock the door under the weight of all the bags she was carrying. She'd left right after her third appointment, which was a little sketchy in her opinion, she wasn't actually sure if she'd helped or made it worse. She stopped at the market and bought enough to make something she knew Kakashi liked, her mother had taught her to cook when she was little and she didn't care much for cooking but she did love food. She was making miso soup and broiled saury, something that Kakashi had been asking for more and more.

She started on the cooking and then started to tidy the house before stopping half way through. She'd always gotten angry at Minato for never keeping the house spotless like her mother had taught her. And today, realizing she felt as though she failed her mother?

Otsuka had always strived to keep her mother happy, as hard as it was, and her mother had always complained she wasn't doing enough. Nothing she did was right, and now thinking that she had begun to do the same thing to Minato her mother did to her. It was unacceptable, she wasn't Minato's mother. She was his girlfriend, and while it was perfectly fine for her to worry and care, she needed to stop treating the man like a child.

With some surprise she realized Minato did much the same thing to her, constant worry and his mother hen tendencies. She knew it was because he hadn't had a family before. It sounded like treating each other as partners and not like children was something they both needed to work on. Maybe she'd eventually get to a place where she could separate herself fully from her mother.

She finished cleaning the table but left everything on the table, she should relax until Kakashi got home and then she'd spend time with him. He was more important, and she was determined to take care of him the best she could.

The food was finished in an hour and Kakashi was home a few minutes later with a young boy. He had a bowl cut and wore a blinding green jumpsuit with orange leg warmers. Otsuka blinked at the child and wondered if the fashion choice was a statement or the boy just didn't realize. "You brought home a friend!" Kakashi's aunt smiled and pulled the tiny boy into her arms.

"No I didn't." Kakashi glared. "He just followed me here."

"Hello youthful young lady! My name is Maito Gai!" His voice echoed and Otsuka winced. "Kakashi and I are eternal rivals!"

Kakashi growled and started to storm off into his room but stopped when he passed the counter. Otsuka watched the internal struggle as he tried to decide if the food was worth staying in Gai's presence. He seated himself at the counter and his choice was clear.

"Well Gai-kun, my name is Otsuka Nara but please just call me Oba-san like Kakashi does." Kakashi had started to call her auntie. It was adorable, but he had already started using it to get her to do things for him. Otsuka saw this as a good step forward in their relationship as she could've hoped for. Still, Kakashi glared into her back and sank lower into his chair.

"Would you like to stay for dinner?" Kakashi audibly protested but stopped when Otsuka gave him a look. The boy before her did not look well fed and she loved Kakashi, another sudden realization, but she also wanted to ensure the boy was fed tonight.

"Of course youthful Oba-san!" Otsuka laughed and watched him practically leap into a chair. He was certainly energetic. Because she'd only expected the two of them she didn't have enough for the three of them but simply gave her portion to Gai. When the boy realized he started to protest,

"Please Gai-kun, I ate earlier today and am still full. We have plenty of food. I can always get something later." The response seemed to satisfy him and he continued to eat.

"So Kakashi, how was school?" The boy groaned.

"Awful, how does Minato-san do it? He wants such perfection with a brush, but I can't even stop to think about a brushstroke halfway through otherwise it leaves a splotch. Except the things he has me copying are so confusing that can't figure out where each stroke stops and ends." Kakashi sighed and looked to the side. She could tell the

boy was feeling dejected and getting antsy. She knew just the thing to perk him up but she'd wait until Gai was finished eating.

"And Gai-kun, how was school for you today?" She turned and watched the boy come alight with his passion. She had a feeling this wouldn't be the last time she saw him with Kakashi. The young boy talked about the youthfulness of learning about taijutsu. Their conversation continued for another 30 minutes and Otsuka was delighted to see Kakashi animated with someone as he tried to tell Gai taijutsu was not the only important thing to learn. Eventually she decided it would be a good idea to break them up as Kakashi got more and more annoyed.

"Well, our letters came late today but Minato sent you a response."

Kakashi immediately perked up and glanced around the house for them. Otsuka laughed and stood and grabbed his from her bag. She handed it over and Kakashi had left the dining table and moved into his room in seconds. Otsuka sighed and gave Gai an apologetic look.

"Gomenasai Gai, Kakashi's been expecting this letter for a while." He waved it away and stood.

"It is about time I head home. Thank you so much Oba-san! Your food is so youthful!" Gai left with a wave and Otsuka was washing dishes when Kakashi re-entered the dining room.

"So? Everything you expected it to be?" Otsuka leaned on the counter and waited for Kakashi's response.

"He sent a lot of tips and more work for my teachers, he also sent a new training regimine!" Kakashi had forgotten any semblance of pretending to be cool, he could finally start on learning more about ninjutsu. "It's mostly chakra control and learning to master d-rank jutsu with one hand like I asked." The Hatake went on about how Minato had said he would do his best to get in contact with his families ninken from his end and see how old they would accept Kakashi and when they would have a dog Kakashi could train.

Otsuka smiled, she was sure Minato was already thinking of him as his kid despite not having met the young boy. He had about a month before he came back, just in time for his twenty-first birthday. Speaking of, she needed to get the man a present, and she was sure Kakashi would want to get him one too. She'd begun to give him an allowance about a month ago for chores and getting his work done.

Kakashi had been learning more in the past three months than he had in the academy. Through discussion with the academy director they'd decided Kakashi would stay at the academy until the end of the year before finally officially graduating. Minato had seen to his training even though he was miles away and Otsuka had been helping him to learn about how to spend and save money, cooking, proper physical and mental health. That last one she was doing as she learned herself, sharing what she'd learned with the young boy seemed to help him more than talking it out with him. Making it out to him as they were learning together, which they were as he'd spent quite a few nights up helping her study, made them equals in his eye, and therefore she wasn't looking down on him.

She'd also had a hand in keeping him away from the never ending glares and horrible comments about Kakashi's heritage and the young boy himself being a failure. They were getting worse and worse, she wanted to find a way to get rid of them completely and force it into other peoples heads. Kakashi was not his father. But that was a problem for future Otsuka, for now she was focusing on keeping Kakashi happy.

The two spent the rest of the night talking, and Otsuka helped Kakashi with his own work and chores at the boy's request. When Kakashi decided he should go to bed, Otsuka pulled out her own letter from Minato. She felt her heart stutter when she looked at it. Kami she missed him.

She tore the letter open and pulled out the contents.

My Dear,

I miss you. I wanted to write you a happy letter but I can't find it in me. Fugaku keeps telling me to stop wasting paper and write the damn letter already. This is about my fourteenth try at a letter to you. I've never been good at lying to you, apparently even in writing. The constant death and fighting here seems to have taken its toll on me, watching so many of my comrades fall only makes me angrier at myself. I should be able to protect them all, otherwise why should I even strive to become Hokage. I know you're busy, I shouldn't dump all this off on you.

They've given me a moniker. The Yellow Flash. Isn't it cool? I certainly approve. The Iwa-nin seem to have good naming skills at least.

I'll be home by the end of the month. I can't wait to meet Kakashi, as

horrible as it sounds, I'm glad we get to take care of him.

The Uzu reinforcements arrived four days ago, I thought you'd be happy to know Kushina is here, she sends her regards. Shikaku has told me to tell you that he will not degin that question with a response. It's safe to say Yoshino isn't happy with his injury. Inoichi requests you give Kin hell and Fugagku wants me to inform you I'm infuriating.

While I trust the second seal I sent, I believe that giving you another method to protect yourself is important. What if something happens while you're out of the house? My dreams have turned to Nightmares, and maybe this will appease them. If anything does happen despite our efforts, the two seals I enclosed just need to be ripped and every ANBU in Konoha will come running. Mikoto is right, we should take the right precautions. Give one to Kakashi and take one for yourself.

More than anything I beg of you to stay safe.

SO much love,

Minato

Chapter 9

Mikoto was knocking furiously on Otsuka's apartment door two hours later. The woman was just about finished with her studying and was starting to wrap up so she could get a few hours of sleep before heading to work.

"Otsuka!" Mikoto's voice sounded watery and disturbed. Otsuka breathed out slowly, stood and called out to her friend to get her to quit knocking. She was sure Kakashi was awake now, but if the knocking ceased, he would probably go back to sleep. Probably. She opened the door and her best friend crashed into her arms, sobbing.

"Mikoto?" The Nara pushed the door closed with her foot and led her crying friend to the couch. She'd only seen the young woman cry twice before in the time she'd known her, the first when her older brother had died and the second had been at her wedding to Fugaku. Things never seemed to be too out of the Uchiha's control and she knew it.

Otsuka felt a hum as Mikoto whispered something through her crying. "Gomen Mikoto, I can't hear you. It's okay to just cry for as long as you need." She rubbed circles into her back as she cried. What could have happened?

Their letters had just come, she knew Fugaku wasn't dead or Minato would have said something. Unless it had happened right before the letters left. Still, it wasn't likely. The contents of Mikoto's letter from Fugaku was probably what had caused the extreme distress. When she felt Mikoto's trembling hands dig further into her pants Otsuka resigned herself to give Fugaku a piece of her mind if it was in fact the man's fault.

She didn't know much about Mikoto and Fugaku's duties as head of the clan and the clan head's wife but she assumed it had to be something like Shikaku's work. With Fugaku gone, Mikoto had stepped up and was handling everything, including the police force. Maybe it was that? Otsuka had eyes enough to see the police force got a little brutal at times and maybe with some pushback from Konoha's council, Mikoto was at her wits end. She had to give her best friend props, she was insane to be able to handle this for so long.

Mikoto quieted down to hiccuping and pushed herself up to compose herself but Otsuka caught her hands and pulled her into a hug. "I

don't know what's wrong, but I'm here for you. Just give the word and I'll help you with whatever it is." Mikoto tensed a little under her fingers but when she pushed her way out of the embrace to look Otsuka in the eye she was determined.

The young Uchiha took a deep hiccupy breath and slowly pulled herself into a calmer state. In a few moments she was ready to speak and gave Otsuka a watery but still grim smile. "I'm going to murder Danzo if it's the last thing I do."

Otsuka, true to her word, leaned back into the couch while thinking about how on earth she was supposed to explain this to Minato and Shikaku. "I suppose we have some deaths to plan then." The young Nara was not one for thought out plans, as she'd recently been learning Improvisation, while terrifying, was her skill. Coming up with plans and tricks in the moment seemed to work much better for her than a well thought out strategy. Shikaku would probably facepalm if he heard her say that.

Mikoto gave her best friend a small smile and took both her hands in hers. "Otsuka, you could get killed if you help me-"

Otsuka cut Mikoto off. "Miko, I've been dating Minato for three years, it's about time I gave him some grey hairs don't you think? Besides, we both know Minato would sooner kill half the village before he let anything happen to me." She entwined their fingers. "What kind of best friend would I be if I didn't join my best friend in treason? Now, tell me exactly what's been happening and don't leave anything out."

It momentarily crossed Mikoto's mind; she'd never really remembered that Otsuka was in fact a Nara. While the boldness was out of character for her best friend ever since she'd started this new job, she'd watched her friend slowly start to grow out of her shell and show the world the strong willed woman Mikotot had known her to be. Mikoto straightened her shoulders and focused on the reason she was here now and began to tell Otsuka everything she'd been missing.

Mikoto spent an hour just telling her the backstory of Danzo's obsession with the Uchiha and the constant meddling he did, he'd been backing the Uchiha into a corner more and more recently. The public disliked the police force and had been calling for change but the Uchiha were too prideful to do anything but insist that they were enough.

Otsuka listened with a furrowed brow and growing anger; even she

had been at least a little bit suspicious of the Uchiha, despite her friendship with Mikoto. To hear that the Uchiha were in fact being backed into a corner made her feel incredibly stupid. There was no way she was going to let this continue, Danzo was already an asshole as it was, like hell she'd just let it continue. The problem would be taken care of soon if she had anything to say about it. "Wait so what happened today?"

Mikoto took a deep breath, "I'm not entirely certain how it happened, yet. All I know is that a few members of the police force were called out to kick some drunk civilians out of a bar. When they arrived the civilian acted disrespectfully and spit in an officers face when they forcefully pushed the man out he retaliated. The civilian began to attack but for some godforsaken reason they used a Katon and practically roasted the man alive."

"Is he still alive?" Otsuka was horrified.

"Yes, but barley, apparently the damage has caused paralysis." Mikoto's hands clenched. "I don't know how yet but I know Danzo's behind this."

Otsuka agreed. The Uchiha may be prideful but they weren't animals. "Did you speak to any of the officers that were there when it happened?"

Mikoto shook her head. "They're all in T&I, I haven't been allowed to have any contact." Frustration and desperation began to seep into her words.

It was becoming increasingly clear to Otsuka that she had missed something. Between Danzo's apparent interest in young powerful shinobi and his attempt at ostrating the Uchiha, he was planning something big. How would setting the Uchiha up in this way help? She'd have to ask Shikaku when he returned about it. Warning bells began to ring in her head when something clicked.

There wasn't a single clanhead that was still in the village, they were all on the frontlines. It was strange that anyone who could make any real fuss about a decision by the Hokage or his advisors were not in the village. She wondered briefly if she should consider involving herself in more of the Nara's decisions. Otsuka was missing enough information that she knew she'd have to start paying far more attention. If only she'd accepted the position Shikaku had offered her when she found out her mother was going to die. He'd wanted her to

be in line to be the next clan head. Despite having no ninja experience he'd affirmed she was the best choice for the position. He'd promised he would train her up until he was sure she could handle herself in a meeting and then shove off many of his obligations onto her so he could laze about more.

At the time she'd insisted that she had no need to involve herself in ninja politics when her mother was approaching her deathbed faster and faster. Now she was realizing Shikaku had been trying to set her up for success her entire life. Playing Shogi, mentioning issues others in the clan were experiencing off hand so she would inevitably handle them on her own, introducing her to all of his ninja friends, the list went on. The scheming jerk.

"Otsuka?" Mikoto was staring at the hallway suspiciously. Ah, Kakashi was probably still awake and listening. The woman didn't have to be a ninja to know Kakashi had a habit of getting into things he really shouldn't. For instance he'd snuck into her room multiple times to steal some of Minato's more advanced ninjutsu books; Minato had told her to look out for the small changes like that and if the book wasn't returned in two days then she should ask him for it back.

"It's alright Mikoto, Kakashi please join us." There was the sound of a door swinging open and the Kakashi appeared at the end of the hallway. He looked as if he wasn't sure if he should be guilty or indifferent. The young boy tended to put up that insufferable mask anytime anyone besides Otsuka was home, even then his emotions were muted if the woman herself wasn't completely relaxed herself.

"It's rude to eavesdrop, Kakashi-kun." Mikoto scolded.

"Then you shouldn't talk so loud." Kakashi responded, he glared at Mikoto. In his eyes the woman was annoying. She was always around to take Otsuka's attention.

Mikoto looked slightly peeved but rolled her eyes at Kakashi's words. "And you shouldn't get yourself caught." Kakashi glared.

"Alright alright, let's be civil please." Otsuka stood and moved into the kitchen. She would help her friend, the problem was simply she did not have the confidence yet to be able to actually take on Danzo. Plus there was no way she was ready to deal with any backlash her actions might cause. Spending months focused on a different way of thinking was certainly helping her down the right path but Otsuka knew deep down that she would die if she took this path and anything went

wrong. Wasn't it Shikaku who always preached that a well thought out plan always goes wrong?

Kakashi seated himself at the counter and Mikoto sunk further into the couch in protest. "I can help." The young ninja revealed one of Minato's scrolls and pointed at something Otsuka didn't quite understand. Mikoto moved to look over his shoulder and scoffed.

"Kakashi-kun you're hardly a fuinjutsu master. You can't even create a bomb tag yet." Mikoto statched the scroll from him and looked at it. "What is this?"

"I can't but Minato-san can. It is meant to compel the truth out of people. It takes a long time and lots of Chakara to create but if Danzo was kept under its influence long enough it could work." Kakashi looked rather proud of himself, but his few glances at Otsuka's face told both of the women he was afraid his idea would be shot down.

"Well you two would know better than I, but we can bring it up with Minato once he returns. All letters leaving and returning are read by someone, Minato is given a little bit more wiggle room as a well known jonin but you never know." Otsuka pulled everything she needed for tea out and set to work. "Right now, we need to figure out how to get in contact with any ninja who was there. Meanwhile I have a few ideas on what we should do right now."

"When did you become such a strategist Otsuka?" Mikoto's voice was light but it was clear she was legitimately interested in the answer.

Ostuka blushed. "Kin has been drilling the importance of thinking ahead into me and teaching me how to act on something that will quickly become a problem." She paused and turned up the heat on the water. "But first, I'll go meet with Yoshino in the morning, I need to make sure I can get another clan to back the Uchiha. With every clan head out of the village, Danzo will take action as soon as possible."

Mikoto nodded solemnly. "I'll start on trying to keep our clan as calm as possible. The elders are going to have a fit and be raging for retribution to a set up." She accepted her cup of tea and held it in both hands.

"Mikoto, I hate to ask this so selfishly, but I can't afford the cost to send a message to the front lines. I need to send Shikaku a letter as quickly as possible, I'd need you to pay for a letter there and back. I need permission from Shikaku to take over as clan representative whenever he leaves the village, ask Minsto about the truth seal thing,

and I'm gonna need Fugaku's written permission to allow a Nara to apprentice under someone in the force."

"Will Shikaku give you that position? Isn't that Yoshino's job?"

Ostuka nodded. "Yoshino hates it, she wants to go back to taking missions. She'll be ecstatic I'm taking over." Ostuka looked to the side and sighed. "Kami, what am I getting myself into."

Mikoto finished off her tea and picked up Kakashi's untouched tea without asking. She needed the warmth of the tea more than he did. "I can pay. But only if you're sure this will work; Ostuka this isn't an easy job and it will be permanent until you can find someone else to agree to taking it." Her best friend smiled one of the largest smiles she'd ever seen. "I know, but I'm not going to sit back, despondent, quiet, and lonely. And I'm rather excited to do something once in my life.

Chapter 10

It took Minato almost a full minute to stop coughing. His face was bright red and he was looking directly away from Shikaku and at the bar to his side. He picked up his water cup again and took another sip. At some point the nice conversation they'd been having had turned into a threat.

Minato had only just started dating Otsuka, she was sweet, thoughtful, and treated him like family. That was what had really caught him, as soon as he'd begun to hang out with the Ino-Shika-Cho trio for lunches and training Otsuka had brought homemade lunches for him too. She repaired his clothing and told him she'd handle his broken weapons with Shikaku's. Inochi had almost instantly begun teasing him about it.

After that Minato had managed to get Fugaku and Hiashi to start to join them in their free time, Otsuka had insisted she make them lunches as well. That was how Mikoto and Otsuka had met.

Mikoto had been livid, thinking Otsuka was propositioning Fugaku. She'd said exactly that. Otsuka had promptly picked up the box she'd made for Fugaku and emptied the thing over his head. She'd said, "Sorry, but I am not sacrificing my first female friend in this group for you." Mikoto had laughed so hard she invited her over for tea and the two were fast friends.

It wasn't until he'd heard Shikaku was in the hospital for a possibly fatal injury that he had even noticed something. Otsuka had been waiting with Yoshino and Inochi when he found them. Yoshino was in Otsuka's arms and Inochi had his head in his hands. He approached slowly and loudly so as not to scare anyone.

Otsuka looked up with watery eyes and gave him a faint smile. It was at that moment he swore to himself he'd never allow her to look so sad again. It dawned on him at that moment that as his worry for Shikaku built, his heart ached to see Otsuka smiling and warmly brushing his worry away. He filed away the start of his realization for a moment where he could afford to think about it.

Yoshino lifted herself enough to see Minato and then let herself fall back into Otsuka's lap. She mumbled something he couldn't understand but Otsuka only hummed and started to stroke her cousin's hair. Inochi seemed to have heard as well because he lifted his head

out of his hands and stood slowly. When he began to move down the hallway Minato followed closely behind.

Inochi explained Choza had stayed behind to clean up the scene and then report to the Hokage. The two stopped at the Nurse's station and Inochi asked about Shikaku's status but was met with an unimpressed look. They turned around and began to head back but Minato caught Inochi's arm.

"He'll be alright." Minato gave his best smile and he could tell it wasn't great as Inochi didn't seem to look any better. The man shook his head and looked over at the two women in chairs.

"He gave me messages for them in case." Minato's breath caught in his throat. It was unlike Shikaku to lose faith in anything. He pushed down the shooting feeling of a burning anxiety. "I'm supposed to tell you to ask Otsuka out already."

Minato turned back to Inochi. With confidence he wasn't aware he had he said, "He *will* be okay." Inochi paused and his eyes met unwavering sturdy ones. A ghost of a smile pushed its way onto Inochi's lips as he subconsciously straightened and pushed his shoulders back a little.

They looked over to see Otsuka and Yoshino staring at the both of them. Minato leaned over to whisper into the clan head's ear. "How loud did I say that?"

Inochi burst out laughing.

Four hours later Shikaku was stable and things were beginning to look up. Yoshino tore her husband a new one while Otsuka braided the man's hair to keep it out of his face. Anytime Shikaku looked to her for support she almost comically steeled her face and nodded along with whatever Yoshino said.

When she had finished, Otsuka moved behind Yoshino and nodded along to what the woman said. When she had finally finished her long rant Otsuka stood and put her hand on Yoshino's shoulder.

"I should really get going and handle all of the Nara's who I'm sure have collapsed somewhere to cloud gaze in anxiety. Inochi do you think you could grab Yoshino some food from Choza's restaurant? She hasn't eaten in twelve hours." She gave Yoshino a serious and warning glance. "Minato, come, we have to coral Nara's." Ostuka ignored the fact that the Akimichi's restaurant was all the way across the village

and there were other places Inochi could grab food from and that word of Shikaku's recovery had already had two hours to get out to all the nosy Nara clan.

Minato didn't miss both Shikaku and Yoshino's grateful glances to Otsuka and he only waved as he followed Otsuka.

As they made their way towards the Nara compound Minato noticed the flock of people who asked how Shikaku was and wanted to check up on the clan head through Otsuka was enormous. They were stopped by at least thirty people who clearly knew Otsuka and seemed to love her. Minato wondered when exactly it was that Otsuka had become such an integral part of Konoha's civilian lives. They all seemed genuinely worried about a clan that cared more about sleeping than work.

It wasn't until they had entered the head house that Otsuka broke down. The moment the door closed she paused and shortly after her shoulders began to shake. He gently placed his hand on her shoulder and she looked up with tears and panic.

"I was so worried it felt like I was going to burst." Otsuka moved a hand over her chest as her breathing started to speed up. Minato helped her over to the couch and sat down next to her. "I felt so", she took a deep shaky breath, "helpless."

Minato locked eyes with the women he had largely considered to be one of the most important people in his life without ever realizing it. Something he couldn't place fluttered in his chest. "So did I." He sat back into the couch and ran a hand through his hair as he felt another push of anxiety move through his body. "It feels awful. But you took care of Yoshino, that counts for something."

Otsuka shook her head and fell into his side. He ignored the warm feeling that blossomed and tried to focus on her instead. "You better keep yourself out of the hospital Minato-kun, I will murder you for stressing me out."

Minato laughed and moved his arm so he could give her a side hug. "Yes ma'am. Well, what's on the list of to-do's today?"

"I know there's at least one meeting with some of the Nara that Yoshino was going to, but besides that my mother is visiting Sakumo today so I'll probably clean up the house in preparation for Shikaku's return and fill out some of his paperwork I'm not supposed to even know about." Ostuka stood slowly and made her way to the kitchen.

She looked back over at Minato. “Tea?” He nodded furiously and pushed himself up from the couch.

“Anything I can help with?”

Otsuka pulled the tea pot out and began making tea. “Shikaku has a stack of scrolls in his office, if you could get them and help me fill them out? I know little of the political things but Shikaku is always going on about his opinions. It's easy enough for me to guess. Oh, be careful of the seal that’s under his desk.”

Minato nodded and went in search of the documents. They spent the rest of the day finishing the paperwork and cleaning up the house. It was in the following weeks he found himself seeking out Otsuka more and more. The more he was around her the more that blossoming warm feeling he felt, the more he noticed Otsuka never actually gave herself credit for the things she did and knew.

He asked Shikaku about it once and the man sighed and said he’d been dealing with this for years. As Minato later found out, it was worse than he had thought. Shikaku had explained to him once that while Otsuka felt she knew all his opinions on politics, he never actually discussed them that often, it was just the few times he had she had remembered every scrap and detail and without thinking had pulled it apart in order to understand better and be able to help him.

Everything she did and understood was because she had noticed and picked up on the habits of others around her. She wanted to help those she cared about and in order to do so she was unknowingly examining them and watching to see if she needed to intercede. What she felt was obvious information was just her naturally doing what she’d been doing her whole life. She noticed the details. Like whenever Yoshino wore green she perked up because she matched her house’s general decor, so when Otsuka bought Yoshino clothing, she bought green.

Shikaku explained Otsuka’s mother had always taught her to catch the details, through games and her own disability she pointed out the tiny things that pointed to pain, struggle, opinions, anything that would give her any insight into someone.

“So how do I make her realize she’s not as useless as she thinks?” Minato’s arms were crossed as he leaned against the door to Shikaku’s office.

“We don’t. She’ll get there on her own.” Shikaku took a sip of his

coffee. “It will all figure itself out. I learned years ago it has to happen on it’s own.” The man before him looked rather content with the way things were currently going.

Shikaku cleared his throat and Minato was back in the present watching the man in front of him give him an unimpressed look. Minato shook his head at the memories that had bubbled up. “Shikaku, I have no intentions of playing with Otsuka’s emotions.” Minato fought down the blush that was still across his cheeks.

Shikaku raised an eyebrow. “That was not what I said.”

Minato rolled his eyes. “You implied it. Besides, while you’re content to sit back and watch Otsuka grow I’m going to prove to her she can do anything.” The two locked eyes and there was something the Shikaku couldn’t place there, but he nodded and leaned back.

He had the feeling everything was going to be fine. Eventually.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This is mostly for fun. Have fun!

Minato stretched slowly and felt his whole body groan. It took everything in him not to simply return to the makeshift bed behind him, he was exhausted. In a few hours he'd be on the move again with his regimen. He'd been proclaimed captain not two weeks ago when their captain had died on the field. He was sorry to no longer have Fugaku and Shikaku at his back but at the very least the experience would help him towards his goal as Hokage.

He stepped out of his tent just in time to see the start of a shift change. Tsume caught him by the arm, and gently tugged her captain to the side. She pulled out a scroll and handed it to him. "Back already? That was quick."

"Yeah well Hokage-sama figured you'd be interested in this opportunity. He would like you to know it's optional, he believes you know best for our regiment."

Minato sighed as he did a quick inspection of the scroll looking for anything out of the ordinary. "What is this opportunity?"

Tsume shrugs, motioning for him to get on with it already. Minato rolls his eyes and opens the scroll surveying the information. "We have the chance to ambush some of Iwa's nin, but it will probably prolong our regiments return for at least another month."

Tsume looks over his shoulder with a feral grin. "A chance to take out some Iwa scum? Count me in." She reached her hand out to pet her companion as he came up to her side, back from delivering the rest of the letters she'd come back with.

Minato stares hard at the scroll in front of him. If they decided to go after this chance it would lead to countless deaths to his regiment that Konoha could really do without right now. An idea popped into his head that caused him a bit of a pause. "Tsume, go get Kusuke and Heiko, I wanna discuss our options before we make any rash decisions." He ignored the whine from Tsume that followed after his order.

In an hour it had been decided that the regiment would be splitting up into three parts with Tsume leading one group to hit the Iwa nin head on, Kusuke to lead one group around to attack from behind, and Minato was left with a much smaller group that would be rushing ahead to prepare the battle ground. They'd be facing a fully equipped and rested regiment of Iwa's nin, but Minato was fairly certain with enough preparation and luck they'd be able to take the whole regiment out.

As quickly as possible the camp was packed. All three groups set off in their intended directions shortly after.

Heiko, the forty-year-old trap expert that could probably make a trap the shinigami himself couldn't escape, was by his side. They planned quietly as they ran.

"Minato-san, we have to make plans in case Tsume can't lead them to the right spot, or if Kouske's team gets lost, or if the Iwa nin know about our ambush, or-" Heiko glared at Bumi to quiet the younger boy down.

"Bumi you're gonna to stress yourself to death, if that happens we will figure it out."

"Mah Hekio, it's good for Bumi to be contingency planning, but if you plan for something to go wrong it will." Minato smiled brightly at the boy who flanked his left, trying to ease the tension in his teammate.

"But aren't we supposed to always be ready for a plan to go wrong?"

Hekio laughed, "Be *ready* for it to go wrong, don't *expect* it to go wrong."

Minato grinned. "Who knows, maybe if you plan for everything that could go wrong then none of the rest of us have to focus on that."

Bumi frowned. "Minato-san, please tell me you are joking?"

Minato gave the boy an innocent smile. "What? But Bumi, whatever shall we do if you don't make those plans for us!" Heiko barely hid her snicker and the rest of the group failed to contain their own laughter.

Minato's hand signal draws the group to an immediate stop. He considered the area around them, unassuming enough but still advantageous. He nods to Lei, who splits from the group to find Tsume's team and help lead them here. "Heiko, work with Daiji to

maneuver that poison, South east so it'll descend on them rather than us. Bumi go cover our tracks, I want no trace of us here. Nobuyuki grab whoever you need to set up camp and the rest of you are with me. This seal needs to be perfect. Dismissed."

With that the group dispersed. Minato had something up his sleeve he was fairly certain would take Iwa by surprise. He'd just finished perfecting the finished seal only a month ago and he'd wanted to field test it on a large scale. He was pretty certain that if they could catch most of the regiment in the seal the poison would be able to do the rest of the work for him.

~

Shikaku sighed at the sight of a personal messenger arriving at his tent. Ever since Minato left he was sure that something was going to go wrong. This was probably the start of another headache he would not be looking forward to. As soon as he glanced at the scroll to see Minato, Fugaku, and his own written hastily across the top he let out another sigh. He had the distinct feeling he was about to experience a lot of yelling.

He shooed away the personal messenger and stuck his head out of the tent to loudly shout. "Inoichi! Fugaku! Choza! Get your asses in here!" He heard two responding shouts and one loud grumble. The three were there within seconds.

Fugaku snatched the scroll in Shikaku's hand and opened it, ignoring Shikaku's eye roll. With a flourish he opened it and revealed the long letter and stack of papers Otsuka had sent to them. Fugaku found his own personally addressed stack of papers almost instantly and began reading, shoving the rest of the paper towards Shikaku. He seated himself unceremoniously at the table, more interested in what he was reading.

Inoichi walked over and glanced at the large stack of paper in Shikaku's hands. The two shared a glance as they both had a sinking feeling in their stomach. They set out the papers and once they had finished Fugaku was growling.

"That fucking bastard!" Choza looked up from the letter he was reading Otsuka had addressed to Minato. "Danzo set up my clan while

I was gone! I should have known leaving the clan was a horrible idea but Minato talked me into it."

"He was right to Fugaku." Shikaku stepped towards him and snatched the letter out of his hand, reading and speaking at the same time. "If you had stayed you would have been the only clan leader left in the village, while I recognize the position it put you in, if you had stayed Danzo would have only had more fuel for the fire."

While Shikaku read, Inoichi opened Otsuka's letter to the Nara head. "Choza, you've won the bet."

"I know." Choza reclined in his seat. He was quite proud of himself. "Though we will have to send Minato this letter. He won't be happy."

"Bet?" Fugaku asked.

"Otsuka has sent Shikaku the paperwork for him to assign her as the defectors head anytime he is out of the village, and Choza just so happened to bet she would take the position over before Minato and Shikaku returned to the village."

"Fuck," Shikaku ran a hand through his hair. "I was certain she would ask Minato before she took the position."

Inoichi smiled a grim smile. "She may be dependent on him but she's taking the steps to be her own person, she would make the decision without him. You, however, are her lifelong confidant. I'm surprised she didn't wait til she could get in contact with you for advice."

Fugaku rolled his eyes. "You're worrying about a bet?"

"Yes" Both Inoichi and Shikaku responded.

"Winner gets the final say in the loser's first born child's name."

Fugaku winced. "That was dumb. But, I will not allow a non-Uchiha to apprentice anyone from my clan. We cannot-"

"All do respect Fugaku, but Otsuka is putting her life on the line for your clan. I would take her suggestion."

Fugaku glared at the Nara. "Would you release clan secrets to my clan? Besides that Otsuka is not a military strategist and has never been trained-"

Inoichi shook his head. "No, she has been. Trust me on that one, just

not conventionally. You think any Nara would allow their child into the world without the proper tools to take over the world? Their just too fucking lazy to ever actually do it."

Shikaku sighed again. He had the feeling this would be a continuous thing. "It is mostly my fault, I lit a fire under her when she was younger. Because of that she's always been subdued on anything that isn't about other people's own personal health."

Choza stood to take the letter from Shikaku's hands and pointed towards the paperwork it would take forever to get Shikaku to fill out. They didn't have the time to waste. "He called her dumb." The clan head supplied the answer to the question he knew would follow.

Fugaku picked up the paperwork Mikoto had sent him. It was against his better judgment, but he understood that the Nara clan was reaching out. He considered how bad it must have been if Mikoto had actually told Otsuka everything. His wife would probably murder him if he didn't go along with this. She thought the world of Otsuka after all.

Inoichi grabbed a stack of the papers Shikaku would have to fill out and started. "Go on Fugaku, fill out the paperwork. You can change it once you get back, until then, trust your wife to make the right decisions for your clan."

"Fine. At least I'm not dumb enough to bet upon my child's first name."

"What would you bet on Fugaku?" Shikaku asked, actually rather interested. He barely avoided Choza's hand to the back of his head as he got distracted.

The man thought for a moment. "Minato will be the next Hokage."

Shikaku scoffed. "That's not a *bet* ."

"Fine." Fugaku stopped only to glare at Shikaku. "Minato will be asking Otsuka to marry him," He paused, "Within the next year."

Shikaku rolled his eyes. "That sounds more like a prayer to me."

"Mah, don't underestimate Minato, I'll give him six months." Inoichi considers his options for winnings. "If I win, you have to let a Yamanaka apprentice under and Uchiha as well."

Fugaku snorts. “If I win, you have to let my wife shop for free at your flower shop until the day she dies.” Inoichi winced. He supposed it was a fair deal, and Kami help him win, otherwise his wife would really kill him.

“I would as well like to step into this bet with the same deal, let an Akimichi apprentice under your clan if I win, and if you win, your immediate family can eat free at my restaurant twice a week!” Choza laughed. “I say four months.”

Shikaku continued to sign papers. “I will stay out of this, I don’t need any more reason for Yoshino to kill me.”

“Oh? You don’t want *two* Nara’s to apprentice under the Uchiha?” Fugaku threw down his pen and began to put away the papers to send back.

“More irritation than it’s worth.”

“Danzo is more irritating than he’s worth.” Inoichi comments. His voice was lower and darker.

Shikaku froze as something finally hit him. “Shit.” The three around him looked up. The man looks down at the papers he’s just finished signing. Otsuka was going to make him go gray with worry and he suddenly was very glad for Minato’s absence.

“Care to share?” Fugaku crosses his arms. He seems to be back in his clan head mode.

“Otsuka was smart enough to realize why having all clan heads out of the village right now is bad. The steps she is taking are the right ones but between her newest ward and this, she now poses the biggest threat to Danzo and his plans.”

The tent was silent.

~

Tsume felt relief as she and her team finally, finally reached the ambush site. It had been actual hell trying to get the entire regiment to follow them. They’d lost quite a few of their team already, and the

nonstop running had been exhausting. They'd acted surprised and fought only enough to make it seem like they didn't have another plan, except in the end Kusuke's team hadn't been fast enough and Tsume had needed to buy time so they could get behind the regiment. So what was supposed to have been two days of running had turned into four.

Her companion growled low to signal he could smell their Captain. Tsume nodded to her companion and took off towards where she could smell her captain. She shunshined the last couple of feet, landing next to him and Bumi. They were standing in the middle of a seal that wrapped and twisted around them before disappearing under the brush.

"Reporting for duty Captain." Tsume gave Minato a tired smirk.

He smiled at her. "We were starting to worry."

Tsume let herself catch her breath for a few seconds before snapping back into the moment. "We had to stall for Kusuke. They're about four minutes away. I ran ahead. They're coming up from the northwest like you asked."

Minato nodded. "Losses?"

"Six. We have a little over half our group left, they started to get suspicious at the end there so we had to get a little……creative with how we got their attention." Minato raised his eyebrows at Tsumes vicious grin.

"How creative?"

"Oh you know, we just kidnapped the Kage's son. Nothing too crazy."

Minato's mouth opened a fraction. That certainly hadn't been in the Hokage's report, they must not have known exactly which regiment it was. He looked at Bumi to get confirmation he had indeed just heard that. Bumi looked just as stunned.

Heiko materialized next to the three of them. "Captain, we're ready to set it off on your mark."

Coming back to himself Minato closed his mouth. "Thank you Heiko, ETA is about 40 minutes now. I'll give you the signal when we're ready." Heiko nodded and dismissed herself. Taking a deep breath Minato clapped his hands together softly. "Now let Operation Ultimate

Super Chakra Total Complete Restraint commence!”

Tsume gave him a look. “Has anyone ever told you you're bad at naming things?”

Minato just waved her off.

Chapter 12

Otsuka sighed as she entered her house for the first time in seventeen hours. As now the only current clan representative for Nara capable of making decisions for the clan she was swamped with work. The paperwork hadn't stopped coming after Shikaku's paperwork had been processed.

There were problems with the rationing among the Nara clan, mostly because half of them hadn't been collecting their rations or had been feeding some of it to the deer. Otsuka passingly wondered if she could get rations for the deer which might solve some of the problems but they were being forced to pull from the clans emergency funds to get enough food for their clan.

In the end Otsuka had gone from house to house and requested that every Nara collect their rations from the main house on Thursdays. Theoretically Otsuka would have all Nara rations delivered to Shikaku's house and she would distribute them herself. It might have caused some problems if it was any other clan but she knew they didn't care.

From there she was clearing d-rank mission requests that multiple houses had asked the clan to pay for. Interestingly enough one of them had been for genin to shape the clouds to settle an argument. She'd signed off on paying it, if solely so she could see the look on Shikaku's face when he read what the report that was about to come in.

Beyond the hilarious issues that only the Nara clan could possibly bring up, Otsuka was feeling herself becoming more and more stressed. The work she was doing wasn't hard, but it was work nonetheless. She made herself some tea while she continued to do paperwork and sent Yoshino to go check on Kakashi while she was out for training of her own.

The tea did little to calm her down but she took a minute to think over the past few months. She was proud of herself, despite sort of throwing herself face first into a new field, she was managing. In fact she was getting better at what she was doing. Kin had handed her two new ninja who'd just started taking sessions and she was incredibly excited to begin helping people from the start of their journey.

She'd even suggested offering sessions to children in the orphanage

and that was a project Kin had handed off squarely to her. It felt good to be relied upon again, but not just because she was the last option. It was because she was proving herself, she was trusted. To be considered genuinely good enough at something that she could begin to hold her own was an amazingly freeing feeling. Kakashi didn't necessarily have to rely on her, but he trusted her and cared for her. The changes that she was making in herself and those around her were things she didn't know was possible.

Her mind fell on Minato. Minato Namikaze. The only pursuit she'd ever had for her own benefit and not someone else's. As it turned out she hadn't been the only one perusing, Minato just didn't catch on until much later. She wondered what he was doing right now, hopefully not something too dangerous. She missed him, it had been a while since she'd even received a letter from him. She finished off her tea and glanced at the time. She was running late.

After that she rushed to work to get in three sessions and after that she was back at Shikaku's house figuring out who to assign the task of picking up the ration deliveries.

When she was done she went home to find Kakashi training outside and she began to make dinner. With the rations she was using she made fish, rice that she cooked in fat, with some added salt, scrambled eggs, carrots and eggplant she'd splurged on solely for Kakashi she made enough to serve four hungry children. She wasn't sure if she was sad Kakashi didn't have someone else with him or to be glad to have some alone time to spend with her ward. She decided it didn't matter as long as Kakashi was happy.

"Kakashi! Dinner!" She served the food and then poured them both tea.

In a minute Kakashi was seated at the table eating his food. "Wash your hands." Otsuka gave the young boy a disapproving look as he grumbled at her. For someone who claimed he could take care of himself he loved to skip out on hygiene.

Kakashi begrudgingly washed his hands before reseating himself and digging into the food in front of him. "How was training today?" Otsuka picked at her food while she also looked through the files Kin had sent her home with.

Kakashi shrugged. "I have to straighten out my lines with the brush still, Yoshino-san checked some of my taijutsu and Hamaru-sensei

stopped by to check my katas. You?" He continued to scarf down his food while he waited for Otsuka to run through her day's activities.

"Fine, fine." She waved it off. "Oh, did you return Minato's scroll on advanced barriers yet?" Otsuka hadn't checked their room yet. She was really losing track of the things she needed to do. She was going to have to make a list. Oh no, was she going to turn into a list person? She'd give herself one list and then that would be it. She would not become a *list* person. Was this what it felt like to be a clan head? She hated it.

Kakashi almost choked on his food and he looked up at the women in front of him with wide eyes. "Y-yeah." He was honestly surprised she had noticed. And if she had noticed this scroll how many others had she known he'd looked at? "I can explain-"

Otsuka waved her hand. "Just checking, as long as you don't do anything with them." She paused to look up at her ward and gave him a smile. After a moment she brushed her hair back and closed the file. A sigh escaped. "What do you say we go for a walk? It's been a long day, and I'm told the east gardens are pretty at night."

Kakashi thought it over and agreed. He'd been opening up more and more. Between Otsuka practically begging him to bring friends home and the therapy three days a week it seemed that his life was starting to come together. At six years old he felt he was ready to take on the world but he found he had been spending his time waiting for Otsuka to come home.

As Otsuka changed into different clothes she called out to Kakashi. "I know I've barely been at home Kakashi, but you come first, so please feel free to ask if you need help." She paused. "Okay?"

She heard a hum come from down the hall and she smiled. She'd learned pretty quickly Kakashi responded better when she didn't make a big deal of offering help. So if she casually brought it up behind a door so he wouldn't feel called out, then she was simply using techniques Kin had been teaching her.

They were out the door shortly after and Otsuka took a deep breath as she took in the cool, fresh air. Tension and stress unwound from her posture and suddenly the overwhelming work felt easier and the hidden panic settled down.

"Should we pick flowers for the house?" Otsuka pointed to the edges of the garden that were generally left for wildflowers to grow on their

own. Kakashi pulled out a kunai Otsuka hadn't realized he brought.

"The yellow ones?" Kakashi had been picking up on the aesthetic Otsuka always stuck too. She liked what she called, "Summer" colors and anything that could be described as bright, striking, or vibrant.

"They're called Chrysanthemums, actually you should learn, it'll be important to know if you ever need to give someone a message or create a poison or antidote. I don't know anything but the basic medicinal purposes and messages of flowers but I'll see about Mikoto teaching you." Otsuka reached over and pointed out another set of flowers. "These are-"

Otsuka was cut off as something blurred and sent her flying across the garden. She hit the pavement hard as pain blossomed in her leg and stomach. She let out a loud scream. She opened her eyes to see two ninja attacking Kakashi. No, no she couldn't let them touch him. She tried to move but found herself falling back onto the ground.

Kakashi had leapt into action the moment after Otsuka had been hit and was currently focusing more on dodging any incoming attacks than actually attacking. The taller man caught him on the thigh before Kakashi retreated enough to start on the hand signs for something.

"KAKASHI!" Otsuka screamed. She couldn't watch him get hurt in front of her. Another ninja appeared in front of her with a scratched out suna headband.

"Heh, you're lucky you bent over. I won't miss this time." He brought his sword back and Otsuka felt fear and horror explode in her chest. She couldn't- No she didn't want this to happen. She had to protect Kakashi, she had to make sure he'd be okay.

As her body began to shake a warmth spread over her skin and a member of the Uchiha police force was suddenly in front of her moving her away from where she'd been moments before.

"Ma'am, I'm going to get you to the hospital as quickly as possible."

"But- Kakashi." Otsuka looked up into red eyes and begged. "Kakashi, Kakashi, he's alone you can't leave him alone! He's-" Her breath left her body and she gripped onto the man who was holding her. This was- no- what was happening? It couldn't be- Why?

"Ma'am, two of my comrades are there helping take care of the foreign ninja."

“I need to make sure he’s okay, where is he?” Otsuka felt more panic, her breath sped up and she couldn’t get words out anymore. Pained sounds came out and as she tried harder and harder to speak her vision blurred.

“Ma’.... am ….. I need….. calm …… take a ….. you need.” Seconds later Otsuka’s world faded into darkness.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

> I don't know why I always insist on forgetting to update until really late into the night but.....

Fugaku paced back and forth between his tent and the campfire that was set up directly to it's left. Eight days. They were supposed to be here eight days ago. Minato's regiment had successfully defeated two entire Iwa regiments and managed to capture the Tsuchikage's son. Impressive considering they'd kept a little over half of their forces alive.

The Hokage had sent a scroll that they were to wait for Minato's forces to meet up with them before they returned to the village. Everyone was antsy. They'd been ready to leave over a week ago and somehow Regiment 10 still hadn't materialized.

There were shouts coming from the south and he turned to see two ninja approaching, they were shouting and looked badly hurt. "We were ambushed on the way back, we were sent ahead to see if we could get help. We need medic nin as quickly as possible." Shikaku barked a few orders out and motioned for Fugaku to go join the two messengers. What had Minato gotten himself into this time. He waited patiently while people rushed about and readied themselves.

They arrived an hour and a half later with a group of less than thirty people. He scanned the group for Minato and found him helping someone to sit down. He spoke to the medic-nin quietly and then was shooed away. He looked unsure of what to do with himself as he glanced around the rest of his regiment. He locked eyes with Fugaku and the Uchiha frowned and moved towards him.

"What happened?" Minato winced and Fugaku got a glance into the facade breaking. He looked exhausted and hopeless.

"We were ambushed on our way back. Iwa must have managed to get a message out and they'd brought reinforcements. The only reason any of us escaped was an accident." Minato glanced at his hands for a moment and then shoved them into his pockets. "Heiko managed to trip one of their own explosives in an attack and wiped out enough we could get away."

Fugaku crossed his arms and surveyed what was left of a powerful regiment. This did not bode well for Konoha. With every regiment starting to return, the next wave of Konoha nin would hold up but there was no guarantee there would be enough time in between for all of them to fully recover. They couldn't afford to lose Minato to a student, those few ninja left would probably now follow him to his death, and would perform better under Minato's leadership than a new captain.

"Once everyone is ready to move we will head home." Choza said as he walked up. He patted Minato's shoulder, he could tell the man was running on Chakara fumes.

Fugaku frowned. "Speaking of-"

"Oi! Uchiha!" His head snapped to the side at the grating voice of one Tsume Izunaka. She was on the ground a ways away and a medic-nin was trying to keep her in one spot long enough to heal her foot. She had a massive wound across her face and her left eye was bandaged. That must have hurt.

"What?" Fugaku's voice conveyed annoyance.

Tsume smirked. "Make sure pretty boy gets rest!"

Fugaku rolled his eyes "Pretty boy?" Minato turned to Fugaku and gave him a teasing smile and winked. When Fugaku glared at him too he rolled his eyes and sighed.

"As I was saying, before I was so *rudely* interrupted. We have some news about Otsuka."

The regiment captain froze. "What? Did something happen?"

"Not technically." Choza supplied stepping forward. Minato cocked his head to the side confused.

"Otsuka took up the position of acting clan head, for anytime Shikaku leaves the village." Fugaku filled in.

"OH?" Minato smiled. "Finally, I've been waiting for her to finally realize she-"

Fugaku shook his head. "Minato, she's currently the only acting clan head in the village." He lowered his voice enough that only Minato would be able to hear him. "She's the only one who can do anything

about Danzo's plans. And with Kakashi already being a point of contention…" He trailed off to let the man in front of him finish the thought.

Minato knew better than to threaten to hurt anyone from the village, let alone a widely loved war veteran. Especially in front of his regiment who'd just spent weeks fighting non-stop. It didn't stop the killer intent that leaked from him, but he managed to stop himself from spamming hirashin to get to Otsuka as quickly as possible.

She was okay. She had to be okay. If he let himself think otherwise he'd run himself into the ground with worry. "Mika-san, how long until we'll be able to start the move to the village. We're all aching to get home." He shouldn't rush them, he really shouldn't. He knew it too. Still Minato found himself wanting to hirashin them all back to the village. He couldn't rush them, he had to remind himself, it would only cause more problems in the end.

"A few more hours, Shikaku-san will have more ninja inbound by now." She smiled at him, if a bit warily. The entire group could feel the killer intent leaking from him.

"Thank you Mika-san." Minato thought for a moment. Two weeks, it would take them at least two weeks to get to the village. Two weeks. He supposed he didn't have much of a choice.

~

For the past week and a half Minato had looked like he was ready to have a kid. He'd bounce around from person to person. Asking who needed help. Can I carry your pack for you? How are you doing on Chakra? Is your foot alright Tsume? Are you sure you should be on it? He'd been smacked for that one.

Shikaku felt about ready to find an excuse to send Minato ahead. He probably would have already done it if the constant questions hadn't seemed to be keeping everyone's focus on how annoying Minato actually was and not the trauma they'd just been through. Inochi called it remarkable. 'ONLY two people have had any problems with flashbacks this entire trip back!' Well Shikaku felt about ready to have a mental breakdown if Minato didn't shut up.

He was worried for his cousin but unlike Minato he didn't seem to need to mother everyone else as a coping mechanism. How the hell did Otsuka deal with this? Shikaku groaned.

“Shikaku, we have a Konoha ninja incoming.” He looked up and nodded to his best sensor nin. Aoba really was amazing, it was honestly kind of scary.

A messenger came into view about thirty seconds later, but he stopped in his tracks looking relieved. “I was sent to check up on you, we expected your return almost a week ago.”

Minato sprung forward. “We ran into some trouble.” He stopped and something dawned on him. “DO YOU KNOW OTSUKA? IS SHE OKAY? HAS SHE BEEN-”

“Uh sir, I don’t know who that is. W-w-would you please stop shaking me….” Minato had grasped their arms and was shaking them back and forth furiously. He stopped upon request and had the capacity to at least look slightly ashamed.

“Minato, please go find someone else to pester about Otsuka.” Shikaku said, barely keeping the amusement from his voice. The man looked like a lost puppy.

Minato sighed. At least he recognized his own mistake. Minato left with his metaphorical tail between his legs and Shikaku briefly wondered how the rest of the world was terrified of him.

~

Otsuka just felt a warm darkness for a while. She did what she could to move into the warmth and just stay there, appeased. But slowly the haze was fading and she was becoming more and more uncomfortable. She realized she was in pain. Actually a lot more pain then she should have been. Why was she in pain?

Then everything came flooding back. Her eyes flickered open, struggling under the heavy weight. Kakashi? She needed to know he was okay. She would never forgive herself if- her eyes landed on a distraught looking Kakashi sleeping in the chair to her left. There was a blanket drawn over him and food and tea. He was okay. The pressure of anxiety lifted immediately. Also it seemed someone had been taking care of him. Good. He would need it, she doubted this wouldn’t cause Kakashi another trauma, especially so close to his father’s death and how close Otsuka and Kakashi had been growing.

She experimentally tried to see if she could lift herself up and her arms pushed her up with little trouble. It was when her stomach started to bend that the pain came rushing in. She couldn’t keep

herself from crying out and Kakashi's eyes shot open and he bolted forward to her. She could see the panic written in them. His tanto was already half out. Oh Kakashi, she would never have wished this upon anyone, least of all him. She gave him a big smile.

"Sorry Kakashi, I seem to have forgotten I was hurt." She laughed a little but winced at the pain. Still she scooted over and patted the bed. "Come on, I won't tell if you don't."

Kakashi looked like he considered it for a moment but when Otsuka began to reach over to grab him he immediately moved into the bed to keep her from hurting herself further. She wrapped her arms around him and drew him against her chest. She took a shaky breath, fingers curling into his hair and her hold tightening. They stayed there for a while and Kakashi ignored her tears while she ignored his own.

His heart had felt as if it was being ripped apart when he saw her fly across the pavilion so suddenly. It had all happened so fast. He was furious with himself for not noticing that they were infiltrators there in the first place. He was supposed to take care of Otsuka, he'd even promised Minato-san that. How was he supposed to face anyone anymore, knowing he'd failed to protect the person he cared about most. *Again* .

He felt Otsuka slow her breathing into long deep breaths. She pulled away enough to be able to look into his eyes. "It's not your fault okay Kakashi?" She gave him a big smile despite her slightly red rimmed eyes. "No one will blame you, because you did everything you could. And I know this will drive you forward to want to become stronger. But just know, no matter what happens, I will always be proud of you. Always." She pulled him back into her again and tightened her hold before reaching up and ruffling his hair.

Kakashi grumbled but felt lighter. He didn't know why, but he felt like beaming at her praise, even as he tried to convince himself he wasn't good enough. Suddenly he was yawning and Otsuka was laughing at him.

"Come on, let's take a nap." He nodded and when he started to move off the bed he found she still had him in her arms. "Uh-uh, no escaping for you! I don't think my heart can take you leaving until I'm sure you're rested up." He begrudgingly cuddled into her form and did everything he could to convince himself this was for her, not him. In a few minutes he was out.

Otsuka looked down at the boy by her side. He looked peaceful now. She sighed and wondered how long she'd been asleep. She looked round as best she could for a calendar of something but she didn't see anything. There was a quiet knock on the door before it opened to reveal Mikoto holding a basket of food. Her face lit up when she realized her best friend was awake.

"Mikoto!" Otsuka whisper-yelled. The woman came in and put her basket down on the side table. She took one look at Kakashi and smiled.

"How long have you been awake?" Mikoto asked. She folded her arms and a small happy smile settled on her face.

"An hour or so. Do you think you could get a nurse? No one has been in yet, and Kakashi and I were too distraught for me to ask him to get a nurse." Mikoto rolled her eyes and with a loving exasperation she left to go retrieve a nurse.

A few minutes later the two were back and the nurse started to go over everything that had happened. "Those ninja nicked an artery, they also got enough of your mussel you're going to need to be in rehab for a while. I can't say for sure if you will have a permanent limp or not, but it is likely. Over all, I expect it will scar but it shouldn't pose any more problems than a small limp when you fully heal."

She did a few tests, which she woke Kakashi up for so she could properly take them. Otsuka had only been asleep for a day and a half. Mikoto had been bringing Kakashi food and sorting out the large problems that came with a temporary clan head being attacked.

Once the Nurse left Mikoto gave Kakashi a look and he stood quietly and left after giving Otsuka a quick hug. "Kakashi," Otsuka called after him. "Please go home and take a shower! I'll be alright here until you return, promise!" He turned to nod at her before closing the door. She was certain that Gai would already be waiting at her house. He always seemed to know when his rival needed something.

Mikoto sighed. "First things first, Kin has already stopped by to let you know that Kakashi will be staying with him until you are ready and able to go back home. Second, you are relieved of your duties at work until you have been mentally evaluated and are feeling ready to come back to work."

Otsuka nodded. She didn't like the sound of not working but she

supposed it made sense. At least Kakashi would have a place to stay so he wouldn't be alone.

"Second, Fugaku sent a letter home with all the paperwork. He was worried that you know who would take this moment to try to take you down. He wanted me to assign you guards with the KPD but instead I just had them keep an eye on you anytime you were out on the streets. As it turns out, that was for the best." Mikoto uncrossed her arms and reached out to hug her best friend. She'd felt her heart drop when she'd heard Otsuka was in the hospital. It took everything she had to keep herself from staying in the room every second with Kakashi. But she had a duty to her clan and to her friend to ensure things ran smoothly while she was out.

"So, then, this attack was Danzo." Otsuka whispered in Mikoto's ear while she tightened her hug. Mikoto felt her heart flutter for a moment but pushed the feeling away.

"It was missing nin." Mikoto said loudly as she pulled away. "Honestly I have no idea how they got through the barrier in the first place but the Hokage is looking into the barrier team." The Uchiha matriarch waved her hands. "Don't worry about it. All that matters now is you are safe and that the Hokage will handle it. *I'm sure once Minato comes home it won't be a problem again.* "

Otsuka furrowed her eyebrows. She looked down at her legs and Mikoto could already tell she was frustrated she couldn't do anything just yet. "Here, I brought food, let's get some nutrients in you." Mikoto smiled at her and pulled a chair up before setting out the food.

Once it was all pulled out Otsuka was smiling brightly. Mikoto had made her favorite, it was a spicy curry that Mikoto's mother had made for the two of them. Once Otsuka had tried it she had asked for the recipe. Of course she had never got it because she wasn't an Uchiha, but Mikoto made it anytime her friend was feeling anxious or depressed. The smile widened when she saw the red bean sesame balls and onigiri.

"Mikoto, you're a literal god!" They both laughed and dug in. As the two relaxed and ate it became increasingly clear the Otsuka was growing tired. She'd been up for five hours or so and Mikoto was sure she needed rest. She left a few minutes later claiming she wanted to check up on Kakashi and then get started on more of her work.

"Get some rest Otsuka!" She called out as she closed the door behind

her.

It took a few moments but Otsuka felt her smile start to fade. She frowned. Something was wrong with her. She felt a little like the room was closing in on her, she didn't want to be alone. She wanted someone here. Someone to….. to protect her. A flash of fear seized her body. Oh, oh no. She was alone now. That meant there was no one to stop Danzo from sending someone to finish off the job. She found herself suddenly wishing Mikoto had stayed longer.

She curled up under the blanket and into the pillows behind her. Her anxiety was building and she could feel her heart start to try to beat out of it's chest. A pressure built in her stomach and as her breathing sped up she felt her body shake a little and her lungs start to hurt. Her fingers went numb. What, what was happening? It was fear, the fear was taking over.

Her body shook more violently. Calm down, she had to calm down! She faintly recognized a beeping outside of her head. Was she going to die? Suddenly she realized it felt like she was looking at herself from far away. She watched her own body start to push further into the pillows but it didn't feel like her. It felt like someone else, yet it was her. Then the door was pushed open and a nurse stepped in. The same nurse from before.

"Ms…… I need you …. breathe …… please breathe…."

Breathe? Otsuka opened her eyes again, she was back in her body, she was looking up at a calm nurse who was smiling at her. She took a breath, there was someone here. Another breath. And another. The woman's voice became less foggy.

"That's very good, keep breathing." A minute or so later Otsuka was rubbing the feeling back into her hands.

The Nurse gave her a big smile. "I'm proud of you for doing that." Otsuka furrowed her eyebrows.

"What do you mean?"

"You took hold of the situation. While you were dissociating, that isn't easy to do. Even if you don't, that's alright too, but it is still something to be proud of."

Dissociating? She paused. That was what had happened wasn't it. The out of body feeling experience, the helplessness, fear, anxiety. The

numbness and shaking. Oh. OH. Otsuka felt like smacking herself. “I see, thank you. Can… can you ask for Kin Yamanaka to come in? Whenever he’s free?” The nurse nodded.

“I can, but I’m only going out for a moment. I think for now it’s best not to leave you alone.” Otsuka nodded. She had some things to think over.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the late update! For some context, Otsuka and Kakashi were attacked around when Minato and his regiment were ambushed. Which means in a few days Minato will be returning home.

Kin was not available at all that day. So she spoke to the kind nurse for the rest of the day until Kakashi returned. From there the Nurse let her know that tomorrow she'd be starting physical therapy and Kakashi was quick to ask if he could attend. The Nurse had told him yes and Kakashi looked as if he was almost over the moon. Otsuka laughed and then caught him in a tight hug.

Otsuka knew Kakashi was not someone who could deal with all of his feelings at once. She also knew that if she was terrified about being alone and Kakashi would probably have similar problems to some level. She sighed. Things had begun to get complicated the moment she stepped into Kin's office. A feeling flickered up in her chest.

Ostuka took a moment to examine it and with some surprise, realized it was excitement. When she thought about it she'd never felt like she'd been involved in something so important. Her job had been a giant step for her, and while she'd certainly been thrown into the deep end, she'd loved every moment of it. There were so many problems to solve, so many issues that were thrown her way, and she had to learn on her feet. It honestly felt beautiful.

Despite feeling overwhelmed by not knowing, she also felt inexplicably excited. Like something about this situation had triggered a part of her she didn't know she had. Was this what being a ninja felt like? She had a newfound understanding of Minato's passion in learning. It was wonderful to test yourself against people and obstacles and find you could overcome them, even if the way to do so took everything out of you.

"Oba-san?" Otsuka paused. His voice was soft from beside her on the bed. He was looking at her worried and confused. Her heart practically melted as the little boy tightened his hold on her arm.

"Kakashi?" She asked as she lifted her arms to braid his hair, with or without his permission.

“You weren’t responding.” He looked at her hands as they worked and Otsuka watched as she saw him debate whether or not to tell her to stop. She held herself back from laughing at his inner monologue and instead responded.

“I was thinking, I didn’t mean to ignore you.” She gathered more hair in her hands as she moved to make sure all of his hair was in the braid.

“About what?” Kakashi held perfectly still while she braided, but his eyes didn’t leave her face.

“I realized that I enjoy my life. I don’t think I’ve ever really enjoyed my life, at least not before you.” Otsuka stopped long enough to pinch his cheek and then resumed braiding. “I always felt like I didn’t fit in my clan. But, Kakashi, I think I finally realized, I *am* a Nara.” She smiled at him and Kakashi froze.

If Otsuka knew exactly what was running through his own head at the moment, she didn’t let him know. She continued Braiding his hair, it wasn’t her place to push him to talk about his father. She could help him but ultimately it would be him who would have to realize that being a Hatake did not make him a failure.

A few hours later Kakash reluctantly left with a side braid that was suspiciously decorated with tiny flowers that hadn’t been in the room two hours before. Soon after Otsuka was asleep and the Nurse stationed in her room was filling out paperwork.

He didn’t say anything when Otsuka jolted awake, he simply stood and offered her some water before returning to his chair. When she burst into tears he asked if she wanted a hug and comforted her until she was hiccuping and pulled away from his hug. She whispered thanks and went back to sleep. The next night, there was a vase of flowers waiting for that same nurse at the front desk, he just moved them to a patient's room who he knew needed the glimpse of outside.

Otsuka ate her breakfast with Mikoto and Kakashi, the former had brought a fruit basket and sweetened milk. Otsuka swore Mikoto was a god. An hour or so later, Mikoto excused herself to her clan duties and Kakashi pulled out his brush and ink to practice more. The day pushed on until noon when someone arrived to take her to physical therapy. Kakashi packed up quickly and helped her into the wheelchair they were using to move her. They wanted to be certain she was under the necessary supervision before she put any weight on

either of her legs.

She was pushed through foggy glass doors to an almost obstacle course like room. There were three other people working through stuff with trainors but a young woman looked up from the corner of the room she was in and smiled at her. She practically skipped over in excitement and reached out to shake Otsuka's hand.

"You must be Ms. Nara Otsuka, my name is Doctor Harada Yui, but please just call me Yui, Nara-san." She practically radiated sunshine and joy, and Otsuka laughed when Kakashi took a step back and wrinkled his nose.

"It's nice to meet you Yui-san, I'm sure I'm in good hands." Otsuka smiled and Yui wheeled her towards the wall where there were two beams on either side at about waist height. Based on the stands they were attached to they looked as if they could be adjusted to the height of the patient.

"Alright Nara-san-"

"Oh, Otsuka is just fine." Yui nodded and beamed at her.

"Well, Otsuka-san, before we get you up, I'm going to ask you if you don't mind me walking you through some warm ups. I'll have to touch your legs to check up on those muscles if you don't mind. You haven't been on your legs in quite a few days, so it will hurt a lot and it's a good idea for us to get the blood moving and stretch your muscles so you don't hurt yourself further." Kakashi seated himself on the other side of the beams so he could watch Otsuka and continued his practice in the corner.

"Please go ahead." The warm ups took about five minutes and as Otsuka started to work the muscles again she felt like she was already quickly growing very tired. This was going to be a long process.

"Okay, I'm going to ask you to stand. Stand slowly and you can use me for any support you need. It's important from now and until I say otherwise you don't try to stand unless I am there. We don't need you hurting yourself anymore than you already have." Otsuka nodded and Yui smiled at her.

With a lot of strength that Otsuka didn't know she had, she managed to stand, while Yui put her hand on Otsuka's back to ensure she didn't put any strain in places that would only further hurt her. They moved slowly over to the beams.

“So, the point is not to hold yourself up with your arms, but to support yourself through the steps you are taking. We want to get you back to walking normally, so we are gonna treat it as such, but it is important you take a break if you need to.”

Otsuka frowned. “I was told it was unlikely I’d return to walking without a limp.”

Yui smiled at her patient. “I refuse to let you do anything but fully recover. Recovery is just as much about your mental health as your physical. Otsuka-san, we are going to get you back to walking!”

It was a little like Otsuka had just been shown a whole new way of life. Something about what she said or the way she said it made Otsuka want to go above and beyond. It was kind of like Minato. “Understood Yui-san.”

It took them an hour to get across the beams, and by the end Otsuka was breathing heavy and ready for a long nap. “That was wonderful Otsuka-san, you should be very proud.” Yui looked a little like she had just watched her child win a contest. “I’ll see you at noon tommorow!”

She was wheeled back to her room by Kakashi. Inside they were greeted by a smiling Kin. “Hello Kakashi. Otsuka, it’s good to see you awake!” He gave her a quick hug and patted the boy behind her on the head. “Why don’t you give us an hour or so, Kakashi? I have to talk to Otsuka about some things.” He smiled at the young boy. “I’ll make sure she stays safe.”

Kakashi seemed uneasy with the idea of leaving but conceded when Otsuka asked him to turn in his homework for today, and finish up at school before returning. When the door closed, Kin pushed Otsuka over to one of the two chairs he’d moved to face each other.

“May I help you into the chair?” Otsuka nodded and pushed down the embarrassed feeling that bubbled. It would be important to act no different and own her injury in front of others. Especially if Danzo showed up unexpectedly. She shoved the anxiety that appeared with the thought of Danzo down.

Kin lifted her into the chair before settling into his own chair. Pulling out his pad, he relaxed into his chair. “So, we have a lot to go over don’t we?” He gave her a tired smile. Otsuka nodded and a feeling of exhaustion settled over her. “I know you need to talk to someone right now, and because of that, I’ve come as your friend and not your boss. I wrote down what I need to tell you as your boss here.” He waved the

pad. “That said you might want to look it over before we talk.”

Otsuka accepted the pad and read it over. It was mostly about fully excusing her from work until she had an evaluation by one of the hospital’s two counselors because she hadn’t worked with either of them yet. The thing that caught her eye was that Danzo had approached Kin about taking Kakashi in while Otsuka recovered. She wanted to break something. This man had put Kakashi in danger because he wanted something out of him. What was it that no one was telling her. It was something that everyone else understood, but were unable to tell her about. At least not yet.

It made enough sense that they couldn’t talk about it while she was in the hospital, but she would be damned if she was kept in the dark about what exactly was endangering her and Kakashi’s life.

“Thank you Kin.” She said through gritted teeth. She took a deep breath. And then another. She could focus on this after they talk. “You’ve been looking out for Kakashi in my absence and that means a lot to me.” Kin nodded.

They fell silent and when Otsuka’s anger receded enough to bring back her exhaustion, Kin finally spoke. “Have you been sleeping?”

“Yes.” Otsuka’s voice was soft. “But I had a nightmare. The Nurses are making sure I’m looked after 24/7 after yesterday’s incident.” She paused for a long time. “I’m scared Kin, what if they try again? What if this time they hurt Kakashi?” Her eyes stung a little. “My mother taught me if you don’t show weakness, no one can hurt you. But does it really matter when all it takes is a fast ninja to take me down.”

Otsuka bowed her head over her hands and let her tears fall. She felt helpless, in a way she hadn’t felt before. If she couldn’t physically protect herself or others in a fight then all her other strengths were of no use. Not if she wasn’t even given the chance to use them. “I want to protect myself, from me and others. I want to be able to say that I got where I am because I worked for it. Minato won’t always be there, Kakashi won’t always be there.”

Besides the helplessness, she felt Otsuka was ready, she was ready for change. She’d never recognized the standards she held herself to and that she’d let fear take over anytime she thought she failed, but now it was time she said enough. She’d been panicking all her life. She’d been leaving herself in the dust while she took care of others and worried every waking moment about letting down the ones she loved.

“I’ve always held myself to unrealistic standards, and I’m going to change that. I’m going to put myself first.”

Lifting her head Otsuka stared out the window at the sun that was high in the sky. She reached up and wiped the tears from her face. It left her face feeling a little sticky but she ignored it. She could feel the sun on her face even through the window. Even in mid fall the sun in Konoha was hot and bright. It made her feel a little better. “I’m ready Kin. I’m ready for things to change.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the late update, as a plus it is a longer chapter. Still, I ain't really satisfied with the first draft of this chapter I had and rather than post something lackluster I wanted to take the time to redraft it.

In a week Otsuka had been cleared to go home using crutches. She was able to walk without any help for a meter or so, so Dr. Yui had decided that it was time to venture back out into the world. Otsuka had strict orders to never go anywhere without her crutches and Mikoto had graciously offered to stay over to help her around the house until Minato returned. So for the next four days, Otsuka had her sessions with clients at home and Kakashi spent his free time running documents back and forth between Kin and Otsuka.

The physical therapy wasn't too bad but with the constant problems cropping up for the Nara, which honestly was getting out of hand Otsuka had never known her clan to have that many problems, her client's sessions and studying she found herself collapsing at the end of each day. The pain wasn't too bad now, as long as she wasn't doing anything more than moving around her house it all but disappeared. Mikoto was also a god send.

She made dinner, helped Otsuka get ready and shower, cleaned the house and kept up her matriarch duties. Otsuka was almost certain this woman could run all of Konoha if she wanted to. Mikoto had left a little while ago to go finish up her clan duties and promised to be back in time to help with dinner, which left Otsuka all on her lonesome.

The young Nara stretched her arms above her head after she set the paperwork she was working on aside. She could finish it later, right now she just wanted a snack and to take a break from the constant problem solving. Reaching over to grab the crutches, Otsuka managed to knock them to the floor. She cursed.

Pushing herself up with her arms she took her time testing out the weight on her legs. She paused. She could hear something outside the door. The handle twisted and the door swung open to reveal a tired, but slightly frantic blonde.

“I’m home!” He called out loudly and his eyes flicked around the room before landing on Otsuka. His eyes lit up.

“Minato!” In a second he was wrapping his arms around her and pressing his lips to hers. He gently pulled away, reveling in the happiness that had overtaken him the moment he saw her. Hands still firmly holding Otsuka to him, he pulled away enough to see her face.

She was as beautiful as ever, hair tucked behind her ears, her eyes wide, and a small smile on her face. He shifted to attempt to move to the couch but stopped at the hiss she let out. “Otsuka are you-” he paused when his eyes landed on the fallen crutches. His voice turned deadly quiet. “What happened?”

Otsuka sighed. She wished Minato could have come home to no problems. She could tell something had happened, and that this was probably about the last thing he needed right now. It was the last thing anyone needed right now. It only made her desire to be able to keep herself safe, stronger.

He had smiled at her but she could tell he was exhausted. His clothes were fresh but she had felt the bandage on his right arm through his sleeve and his eyes and face revealed the tell tale signs of chakra exhaustion. She’d make sure he stopped at the hospital with her later. She took the two steps from her spot in front of Minato to the couch. She let out a breath as relief flooded her body. Standing had taken more energy out of her than she cared to admit.

“Kakashi and I went out for a walk to the east gardens. I was busy showing him some flowers and some missing nin happened to be around.” Otsuka could practically feel Minato getting angrier by the second. “They didn’t manage to hurt Kakashi, and the Uchiha police got there in time to save us. It wasn’t too bad, just my left leg and upper hip.” Otsuka lifted her skirt to reveal the long jagged wound.

Minato’s brow was furrowed as he knelt to assess the wound. His hands shook as he gently pulled her skirt back down over her leg. An image of a bloody and crying Otsuka flashed before his eyes and he went cold. He wanted to go rip Danzo apart but he wanted to rip himself apart even more. He hadn’t been here when Otsuka had needed him. What if no one else had been there? Otsuka could have died and he wouldn’t have even known until weeks later. That thought alone made him ready to storm down to the Hokage’s office and demand Danzo’s execution.

Eyes lifting to meet Otsuka's, he tried to reassure himself that Otsuka was fine. She smiled at him and for a moment he could see blood dripping from her neck. He tore his eyes away from her face and did his best to bring himself back into the moment.

"Minato." Otsuka gently tugged at one of his longer strands of hair. It took a few moments but he slowly met her eyes again. Concern was written plainly across her face, but she didn't mention anything. He watched her come to some unknown decision. "Welcome home." That was all it took for Minato to fall apart.

Otsuka watched as Minato curled into her legs from his spot on the floor. His shoulders shook with silent sobs. Ignoring the protest from her legs, Otsuka pulled herself off the couch and to the floor beside her lover. She tugged him into her and he moved without any protest. Quietly she combed through his hair with her fingers and began to braid it. It was clear Minato was just as in need of therapy as Kakashi, but she doubted he'd be able to receive it with the current state of Konoha's war.

Still, Otsuka would pull whatever strings she had to, to keep him home for as long as she could. His mental health came before anything else, the same way Kakashi's did. The boy would probably be home in a few hours and she knew Minato would hate for Kakashi's fist view of him to be this.

Starting to softly hum she began her next small braid. Slowly, Minato stopped shaking and simply sat where he was. He pulled one of the braids into view and inspected it. Otsuka really did love to braid people's hair anytime she was worried for them. The laughter started out as nothing but a huff before he was struggling to breathe.

"I get the feeling you're laughing at me." Otsuka tugged at a strand of his hair. "Here I am helping you and you're laughing at me!" Minato regained enough control over himself to stop laughing and speak.

"How have I never noticed you did this whenever you're worried?" He relaxed into Otsuka's chest and started to count the tiny braids.

Otsuka shrugged and shifted to allow her left leg some relief. Honestly this man caused her more trouble than he was worth. She wouldn't mention his breakdown until later tonight when they'd have the time. For now she'd do her best to keep him happy until Kakashi came home and the rest would work itself out from there.

While she continued braiding, Minato took the moment to really take

in his apartment. It looked different from the last time he'd been here a few months ago. Otsuka had redecorated with books, books, and more books. They ranged from books on trauma to books of Konoha's laws. He smiled, he'd probably have to set up another bookcase in his bedroom. Their bedroom.

Otsuka had moved in, and less than two weeks after that, he'd been forced to leave. He hadn't even been able to help her completely unpack. He frowned and wondered if he'd even have any room. If his office had been repurposed to Kakashi's room then he imagined both rooms would be full of stuff. Maybe it was time he started looking for a house. He filed the thought away for another time at the sound of the door opening.

Glancing over, he saw a young grey haired boy entering. His eyes were wide as he took in the scene before him.

Minato smiled. This must be Kakashi. He felt Otsuka let go of his hair so he stood and pushed himself up from where he was seated. He turned to help Otsuka from the floor but she shooed him with her hands.

He realized he was nervous as he turned back to Kakashi. He was a little unsure of how to greet the young boy he had never met before but was already starting to consider as his son. "Hi Kakashi!" He moved over and put his hand out. Otsuka warned him the boy was rather weary of physical contact. "It's nice to meet you, I'm Minato Namikaze." He gave Kakashi the biggest smile he could.

Kakashi nodded and reached his small hand out as well, trying to conceal his nervousness. "Hello Namikaze-san-"

Minato laughed. "Kakashi, please call me Minato, or Sensei, either is fine."

Otsuka pushed herself onto her knees and before anyone could say anything more, Kakashi was over by the couch, picking up the crutches and helping Otsuka to her feet.

"Thank you, Kakashi. How was school?" She moved into the kitchen and started to open a cabinet. This time it was Minato who was next to her, he grabbed the tea pot off the shelf and the jasmine tea that Otsuka pointed to.

Kakashi seated himself out the counter and sighed. "I'm still struggling with getting the proper full circle stroke." Minato perked up.

“That makes sense, it’s hard to keep the ink even and then thin the brush stroke at the end.” He placed the teapot on the stove and turned to the counter. “It’s also harder when you don’t have someone to show you the technique directly. The work you’ve sent me is impeccable for someone who’s been learning from just my writing. Do you mind showing me what you have so far?”

Once Kakashi had produced his scrolls, Minato was leaning over the counter and illustrating the technique and explaining his process. Otsuka smiled at them. They’d be just fine together.

“So I don’t even need to actually shift the brush in the first place?”

“Nope!” Minato smiled at his student. Kakashi was really something else. The amount of improvement over this short time was incredible.

“Minato, do you think you could stop the tea from boiling over the pot?” Otsuka asked, the obvious humor in her voice made the man blush. He served the two tea while Kakashi left to go grab both more of his own work and some of Otsuka’s textbooks so she could study while the two worked.

“He’s honestly incredible, Otsuka.” Minato said, staring at the paper in front of him. Once Minato had explained it, Kakashi had been able to instantly replicate it.

“I know.” She sighed. “I’m happy you're finally home. He’s been beating himself up over that stroke for the past three weeks. Plus, I have a question.”

Minato cocked his head to the side and waited, trying his best not to stare at the crutches she had leaned up against the counter.

“Would you come with me to physical therapy tomorrow?”

He froze. Of course Otsuka would need it, but hearing it just made him angry again. Danzo would pay for this, Minato was going to ensure it. “Of course I will.”

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> Wow I didn't mean for that much time to pass in-between updates but isolation is getting to me. Still I am dedicated to this story and even if there is a few weeks between chapters I will still update.

When morning came Minato fled from the bedroom. He hadn't been able to get any sleep, he was too restless and anytime he closed his eyes all he could see was flashes of the ambush. He watched his friends die over and over, because of him, because he had failed. At some point Otsuka had woken up and all it had taken was one glance at him and she had wrapped her arms around him and then fallen back asleep.

Still Minato found himself in a battle with his own mind as he struggled to think about anything other than his failure. After hours of this he was done, and as soon as he could see the sun, he'd gently unwound Otsuka's arms and left.

As he moved past Kakashi's room he heard the sound of a brush on paper and smiled. Kakashi seemed determined to impress him. Running a hand through his hair, Minato made tea and then pulled out his newest project and set to work. The hokage had assured him he'd have at least two weeks off and he was determined to finish perfecting the Hiraishin. It was still too slow for his tastes.

Time flew by til he felt Shikaku and Fugaku approaching his door. He unlocked the door before they fully made it and invited them inside with a tired smile. Neither Shikaku of Fugaku said anything about the bags under his eyes. He was grateful for that.

"What brings you here?" Minato questioned. He closed the door softly behind him but he knew Kakashi was already awake and Otsuka would probably be aroused by their voices.

"How is Otsuka?" Shikaku asks a subtle underlying anger in his voice. Fugaku stands by the door while Shikaku takes off his shoes and invites himself to sit down by the counter.

Minato frowns. "She's alright. Still on crutches, she said she'll probably be off them in two weeks." Pushing aside his work, Minato moves to serve the two tea.

“Good, Yoshino said the doctor expects her to make a complete recovery.”

“Otsuka said realistically she might be stuck with a slight limp.” Minato hands one cup to Sikaku and motions for Fugaku to come sit as he places his tea in front of the empty stool. “But they’re all hoping for the best.”

There's a soft thud and all three snap their heads to the side. Before Minato can rush into his bedroom Otsuka calls out. “KAKASHI!”

The door pops open and Kakashi walks down the hall and into Otsuka’s bedroom. They watch in silence until a minute later Kakashi and Otsuka emerge from the bedroom. The female Nara pats his head as he stops to close the door behind her.

“Ah, Shikaku!” Otsuka’s smile widens at the sight of her cousin and she moves a little quicker.

“What was that?” Minato asks rather softly. She can see the concern written plainly across his face. She waves her hand at him dismissively.

“I always knock over my crutches, I’m a little clumsy. So what brings you two here?” Otsuka reaches out to Shikaku so she can properly hug the man.

“We’ve come to check up on you. Also we have some news.” Having been released from the hug, Shikaku leans back to study his cousin. Her weight rests almost entirely on her right foot as she stands there.

Kakashi moves to the couch and begins to read a book quietly. His eyes flick back and forth between the new people, Otsuka, and his book.

“What news?” Otsuka asks.

“The Nara clan has declared a close alliance with the Uchiha. We have also declared that we owe them a debt.” Shikaku says. Minato’s mouth drops open a little and Otsuka stands still and blinks a few times.

“Well if I’d known them saving me would enable us to solve the Uchiha isolation problem then I would have staged getting hurt ages ago.” Otsuka says with some humor. She smiles at Fugaku. “I’m glad something good could come of this situation. Turning Danzo’s actions against him, serves him right.”

“It was really only because you were the current acting clan head that gave us the reason.” What Shikaku didn’t say was he’d never considered himself close with Fugaku. Certainly not enough to take the risk of aligning himself with the Uchiha. He’d only finally decided to take the risk of aligning himself with the Uchiha to shove it in Danzo’s face. It would also give Otsuka extra protection while everyone else was out of the village. Minato would probably be gone in less than a month and Shikaku was sure at most he’d be in the village for the next three months.

“Still, I’ll take the win. Plus it gives us the perfect disguise to send a Nara to teach under the Uchiha, as long as they send an Uchiha to train under the Nara!” She gives Fugaku and Shikaku a big smile that tells them both if either argued they’d regret it.

An hour later, after the finer details were planned and Minato had set up another time for the three to get together before they were both off to start on the paperwork.

“Kakashi aren’t you late for school?” Kakashi looks up from the fuinjutsu book he had been engrossed in. Alarm spreading across his face as he looks at the time. He shoots up from his seat and begins to collect his things while Minato begins to laugh at the young boy’s frantic motions.

Otsuka snatches a blank paper from the stack Kakashi practiced brush strokes with. Scribbling down an excuse that involved Kakashi helping her around the house before he could leave, she held it out for him as he approached the door. “Have a good day!” She calls as he leaves the apartment.

Minato recovered from his laughter enough to move behind Otsuka and wrap his arms around her. “I’ll have to remember to stop by and ask to borrow Kakashi tomorrow. It’s about time I teach him more than fuinjutsu and basic training exercises.” Otsuka leans back into him and sighs contentedly.

They stay there for a minute, enjoying eachothers company. Minato moves his head to rest atop Otsuka’s and adjusts his hold around her. “Hey, where did our picture go?” His voice comes out slightly muffled because of her hair.

“Oh, well, I had someone make a new custom frame, it will ensure the picture stays in perfect condition.” He watched her twist her hands in her lap and he knew there was something she was keeping from him.

By the blush on her face it wasn't anything important, so he took the gift for what it was. Besides, if the new set of dishes were anything to go by she'd probably dropped them all onto the counter and knocked the picture. "Also, my appointment is in about an hour so we have a little more time before we have to leave. Can you help me get ready?"

Minato smiled at her and lifted her out of the seat despite her protests. "Mah, what kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn't carry you everywhere?" Pushing the door open with his foot they entered their room.

"I need the dark leggings and a short sleeved shirt." Once she was on the bed Otsuka pointed to the proper drawer. Minato hadn't been home long enough to even learn where she'd put her clothes, he frowned. "Minato?" Her voice was soft.

"Yes?" He rummaged through the drawer to find what she was asking for.

"Do you think you could teach selfdefense? Just enough to protect myself from..." She trailed off and watched as the Jonin before her froze for a split second before he turned around to face her, clothes in hand. His expression was hard and fierce.

"Of course I will Otsuka." He placed the clothes to the side and stepped closer to her. Taking her hand, he squeezed it hard. "No one will ever be able to hurt you again. I'm going to make sure of that." And from where Otsuka was sitting, she believed every word. "How do you feel about learning Fuinjutsu?"

~

When Kin stopped at Otsuka's apartment he wasn't really sure what he was expecting but he certainly hadn't expected opening the door to a wall littered with kunai. "Do I even want to know?" He asked.

Otsuka looked over at the door from her position on the opposite side of the room. "Kin! Minato got someone to fix up my crutches so I can shoot Kunai out of it! Kakashi has been helping me aim." She reached out and patted the young boy's head.

Kin shook his head and approached slowly, weary of the newly improved crutches. "Well I came to pick up the paperwork and discuss some more work. But it seems as if you're a little busy." He looked up at the upside down Minato, who was currently squatting on the ceiling to get a better angle for the seal he was making on the wall.

“Oh, don’t mind me, I won’t be done for a while, so you aren’t disturbing anything.” Minato dipped his brush again and Kin decided he didn’t want to know how he was managing to keep the ink upside down without spilling it.

They seated themselves at the counter and Kakashi started to finish his sealing work at the couch. Kin glanced through the work Otsuka had done and he had to admit he was impressed. “So, I was wondering if you’d be willing to consider a new position.” Kin said. “Well we’ve just had an influx of shinobi come back from war. We need someone to oversee their mental health checkups and decide if any are in need of therapy or the like. You’ve been working quite hard, and as most of your patients are retired shinobi, I know you have the experience you’d need for the position. Obviously you won’t be expected to do all of the work and you’ll have help but you’ll be leading the new branch. It will especially help that you won’t be leaving the village.”

Kin smiled and leaned back, glancing at the man up on the ceiling and speaking only slightly louder. “You’ll be able to spend all your time at work with those paranoid shinobi, helping them with their problems.”

While the comment had probably been meant for Minato, Otsuka did not miss the point. She was aware that while it was not the reason she was leading the branch, an added bonus of being in the branch would be the presence of shinobi that had just returned from war. Alert and ready for anything to happen at a moments notice. Shinobi who she’d be helping through their problems and earning their trust, and once a shinobi trusted you, they’d protect you to the end.

To Otsuka gaining their trust and protection wasn’t the point of helping people, but Kin was highlighting all of the advantages of the position. It was at that moment Otsuka realized Kin wasn’t selling the position to Otsuka, he knew that she would want the position because of the opportunity it would give her to take the next step in her job and to help others. He was selling it to Minato. The man had just returned from war himself, and Kin was trying to ensure Minato wouldn’t hinder her.

Otsuka smiled at Kin. She knew he didn’t know Minato well, but the logic made sense. Otsuka had just been attacked and with the war he’d just returned from, it made sense that Minato wouldn’t want to let her out of his sight and to protect her from everything. And while it was true, Minato hadn’t left a 30 foot radius from Otsuka for as long as he’d been home, she was certain he wouldn’t stop her.

“I’d love to accept the position!” Otsuka trusted her ability, she’d earned this position, otherwise Kin would have just put her on the team.

Kin smiled back. “Good, because you have a lot of work to do. I assume you’re still going to work from home for the next few weeks? Normally I’d suggest setting up a space for patients to come in so you could still talk to them but…” He glanced around frowning.

Otsuka looked thoughtful and inspected the apartment herself shaking her head. It was too small, besides she suspected Minato might go crazy having other shinobi he didn’t know in the apartment. “I think I’ll come in Thursday of this week, and since Hinoshi’s appointment is the only non Thursday appointment, could you see if he’d agree to stop by the academy Monday? We can use an empty classroom and that way Kakashi can help me on his way to the academy.” Kin nodded.

Hammering out some more details, he was off shortly after. “Kakashi, Minato, what do you want for dinner?” Otsuka asked, she couldn’t make things but she’d send the two out to pick up food.

“Ramen?” Minato asked, perking up. Otsuka resisted the urge to roll her eyes, of course that was what he wanted.

“Kakashi?” Otsuka glared at Minato as he opened his mouth to complain about the wordless dismissal.

Kakashi glanced between Otsuka and Minato a few times before quietly saying, “I’m good with ramen.”

“Oh no, Minato’s already corrupted you!” Without hesitation Otsuka picked up one of her crutches and pulled the trigger to shoot a kunai directly at Minato. After he caught it and stuck his tongue out at her, she pulled the trigger a few more times.

“KAKASHI SAVE ME!” Minato dove behind the small boy, and peaked over his shoulder. Kakashi froze but didn’t move.

“Kakashi can’t you see, he’s just using you to get to the ramen! Come here, I’ll protect you from his evil salty ways!” Otsuka’s eyes sparkled as she reached her arms out to Kakashi.

Kakashi briefly wondered if this was what it felt like to have parents. Whatever Minato said back to try to convince him to stay went unheard. He tried to stop it, really he did, and the tears came anyway.

But they were happy tears.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> I swear I knew what I wanted to do for this chapter, but then like eight other things wanted to happen too.

“Masaki, would you feel safer if we relocated you? I can have a discussion with Kin about finding an open apartment in the Jonin complex.” Otsuka tapped her pen against the pad.

Masaki frowned. “The elders would never allow me to move out of the clan compound.”

Otsuka waved her hand. “Let me worry about that. If you staying at the Hyuuga compound is only hindering your recovery then I will remove you from it. What I need to know is if you are interested in leaving.”

Otsuka watched Masaki go through an internal struggle, her forehead wrinkled. “Yes Nara-san. I would like to leave.” While she looked worried, Otsuka watched as some tension faded from the Hyuuga’s body. That was all she needed to know to be certain she’d made the right call.

“I will make it happen. In the meantime, how have the grounding exercises been working for you?”

“They do help sometimes, but I am still struggling to remember to ground myself before I-” Masaki cut herself off. Her hands tightened their hold on her clothing. “I don’t usually remember.”

Otsuka refrained from frowning. It must have been getting worse lately, she wondered if that was because of the two weeks of missed therapy session. Otsuka promised herself to never miss them again. “That's alright, let’s try something. Anytime your fingers feel numb, I want you to think about grounding yourself. If you can’t feel your fingers, think about what your clothing feels like, what does the surface you’re sitting on feel like? Try it now.”

The Hyuuga before Otsuka shifted a little, her hands spread out as she described the feeling of her clothing and the sofa she was seated on. Otsuka walked her through a few more questions before it was time for Masaki to leave.

“Alright, I’ll see you next week. If you need to, please feel free to schedule another session earlier okay?” Otsuka set aside her notepad.

Masaki nodded. “Thank you Nara-san, but I’m not sure I will make it to the next session, I have an escort mission.”

Otsuka frowned. Masaki shouldn’t be on active missions yet. “Who are you escorting?”

“Some ninja from Uzugakure. I will probably be back in time for our next session.”

“Alright, stay safe.” As the Hyuuga left, Otsuka folded her arms. She’d missed way too much work, she’d let down her patients and she was never going to let that happen again. And someone had let Masaki Hyuuga back onto the active duty roster without her permission. If Masaki died on this next mission Otsuka would never forgive herself, she would have to ask Kin about the oversight. Something was wrong there, she just wasn’t sure what yet.

Grabbing her crutches from where they were hidden behind her chair, Otsuka moved to her desk and began to go through the other files she’d been given. Kin had given her every file that would need to be reviewed before any of the war returned ninja could have their mental evaluations. If the ninja didn’t pass their evaluation theoretically they would be unable to return to active duty. However with the war going on that might change to any ninja who didn’t need to be admitted to the ward could be pulled. Otsuka was sorting the files when there was a knock at the door.

“Come in!”

~

Kakashi panted from his place on the ground. Minato-sensei had ran him into the ground, anytime he made a mistake his teacher would push his forehead protector over his eyes. Pushing his headband back up so he could see properly he glared at his sensei. The man just laughed, he hadn’t even broken a sweat the entire three hours they’d been at it.

Their morning had been spent going over basic sealing theory before Minato had brought him to a training ground and finally allowed him to begin making actual seals. He’d only been given Konoha’s standard exploding tag but had been promised further material once he had it memorized. Then Minato had wanted to see what Kakashi could do

and that had led to their mini fight.

Standing up, Kakashi brushed the dust off his outfit and set about retrieving the kunai he'd used. Minato cleared out the ninja wire and dismantled a few of the unsprung traps he'd set. Ten minutes later they were back in the clearing.

"That was very good Kakashi. Your chakra control and taijutsu were well above the standard a genin should be at. Tomorrow you'll be at school but Saturday I'll teach you an earth jutsu and a d-rank genjutsu." He looked at the sky thoughtfully before smiling. Reaching out and patting his students' hair. "What do you say we go annoy Otsuka at work?"

Kakashi nodded and the two set off. "Minato-sensei? Where did you learn fuinjutsu from?"

Minato rubbed the back of his head a little sheepishly. "At first I taught myself. But one of my friends, Kushina, eventually offered to teach me once she found out I had been experimenting. After that I spent about a year in Uzugakure learning from some fuinjutsu masters." They turned a corner, entering one of the market areas. Otsuka worked towards the center of the village.

"You've been to Uzugakure?" Kakashi looked intrigued.

"Yes, it's beautiful there. Maybe once you've learned a bit more I can take you there." After the war, went unsaid. "Kushina would probably be ecstatic to have us."

Pulling open the door for Kakashi, Minato felt another signature in the room with Otsuka. He stopped at the front desk with a big smile. "Ah hello, I was wondering if Nara Otsuka is with someone right now? Do you know when she'll be free?"

The receptionist informed him that Otsuka was not currently with a client and should in fact be free. Making his way towards his girlfriends office, Minato heard Otsuka's voice, loud and angry. He picked up the pace.

"You cannot just decide when one of my patients is ready to go on active duty, Amburame-san!"

"Nara-san, we are in need of the skills of these ninja. Any further argument must be taken up with the Hokage."

Minato practically forced the door open, a large fake smile plastered to his face. “Otsuka! Kakashi and I-” he paused giving the ninja before him a meaningful glance. He was certain the man was not a Jonin. “Am I interrupting?”

“Certainly not Namakazie-san, I will take my leave.” The man did everything but run out the door and as soon as he was out of his sight Minato couldn’t sense the man anymore. He turned to Otsuka, who looked about ready to scream.

“What was that about?” Minato asked, picking up her crutches to hand to her. Kakashi entered the office, looking between Otsuka and Minato, concerned.

“Someone is trying to-” She paused when she saw Kakashi. “I’ll tell you later, so how was training Kakashi?”

Kakashi looked between Minato and Otsuka, it was clear he understood something bad was happening and that he was being excluded. He thought it over for a moment before deciding that Minato-sensei would tell him if it was important and he took over the responsibility of changing the subject.

“Sensei is going to teach me two new jutsu on Saturday, and he said when I get better at fuinjutsu he will take me to Uzugakure.” While Kakashi bragged about his training and everything Minato had done for him, Otsuka relaxed. If Kakashi was happy, then she would be happy too.

Otsuka looked up at the clock and smiled. “Well I say we go make some dinner!” She had to make sure their rations didn’t go to waste. Konoha wasn’t in dire need yet, and thus markets and restaurants were still open, but while the prices climbed every shinobi was entitled to a small amount of rations to help offset the cost. Konoha couldn’t afford to have ninja starving.

They walked home and by the time they reached the apartment stairs Otsuka was exhausted. This was the first day of real work and moving she’d had in a long time. Minato carried her up the stairs and promised to make dinner. It wouldn’t be good but it would do for now. As he cooked, Otsuka unsealed the documents she’d brought with her and asked Kakashi to retrieve a few books from her room.

Something was up. War or no war, ninja who weren’t on active duty could not be returned to active duty unless they had been cleared by a psychologist. It was imperative that they didn’t send out unstable

ninja who could cause their team major injury or death. If they had a flashback or breakdown mid mission it could cost everyone their lives.

While Otsuka's absence would mean that her patients would be temporarily deferred to another specialist, none of those people would clear her patients for active duty. She hadn't had the time to ask Kin about it but she was certain he'd be just as surprised to find out that someone had been clearing her patients and sending them directly into missions. She supposed it could make her look bad, especially if missions with her patients went awry. But if she made enough of a fuss about the situation everyone would know it wasn't her.

The ninja who had arrived at her office today had tried to use the Hokage to scare her off from looking more closely. Which probably meant that the Hokage didn't know that this had happened. If he had said it was the Hokage's order then Otsuka wouldn't have been able to do a thing about it. It wouldn't have stopped her from fighting for her patients til the end, but when she went to the Hokage to argue he'd say that his word was final and leave it at that.

So what was the goal? Discredit her, maybe… No, the point was to hurt her. It was clear Otsuka cared about what she was doing. If something happened to her patients she would never forgive herself. They trusted her to do what was best for them, and if she failed that trust it would ruin her. Whoever was doing this wanted to push Otsuka down and keep her there. Well they were in for a nasty surprise.

Dinner is quiet while the three of them study and Ostuka waits for Kakashi to go to bed before she asks Minato.

"Minato?"

"Yeah?" He is sitting at the other end of the couch on the floor.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" Otsuka grabbed a book and began to flip through it.

"I was going to train, why?" Minato puts the book he was reading down and looks over at Otsuka.

"Do you think you could schedule a meeting with the Hokage?" Otsuka continued to flip through the pages of her book before she found what she was looking for.

"I can," Minato set's his book down and meets her eyes. "Should I be

concerned?”

Picking up her pencil she began writing, she had a lot of research to do and only a short amount of time to do it. “Not for me.” Otsuka’s smile is razor sharp.

Minato grins. He’d been waiting a long time for his girlfriend to finally come into bloom. Pushing himself up from his spot on the floor he reaches out and captures Otsuka’s lips with his own. She sighs into the kiss and tugs him down onto the couch. His left hand comes to entwine in her hair as his right helps guide her into his lap.

Pressing herself against him, Otsuka let her arms travel slowly down Minato’s chest to wrap around his waist. She let his tongue push into her mouth as he slowly maneuvered himself under her, careful to avoid her wound. As his tongue explored her mouth, Otsuka felt shivers run down her spine. There was an intimacy that the two had never shared before.

After a few seconds Otsuka pulled away just enough to catch her breath. Her boyfriend gave her a smile before peppering her face with light kisses coaxing butterflies into her stomach. Otsuka laughed at the sensation. Surging forward, Minato nipped at her ear and pulled his hand from her hair to cup her face.

Otsuka took a shaky breath, leaning in to kiss him again. She melted into him, hand brushing over his arm to tangle in his hair. His thumb rubbed her cheek as he let her give him kiss after kiss. She moved slowly from his lips to his chin to his neck, before eventually snuggling into Minato’s body. When he pulled her closer and wrapped his hands around her hips she sighed contentedly.

They stay that way for a while, relaxing into each other. Eventually Otsuka reaches out to yank on one of the two long strands of hair on either side of his face. Minato moves his head to face her, giving her a mock scowl.

“What was that for?”

“For derailing me from my work.” Minato smiles and lifts his hand to cup her face. Otsuka watches Minato stare at her with large puppy dog eyes and she melts inside. He’d always looked at her like that, like she was the most important thing in the world to him.

Otsuka wants nothing more than to keep him happy for the rest of time. She knows he’s been having sleepless nights and she can see the

haunted look in his eyes anytime he thinks she isn't looking. Kissing his cheek, Otsuka pushes herself off him and seats herself next to him. Gently she pushes him down into her lap and picks up her book again. "Why don't you take a nap, it's going to be a long night and I'll still be here when you wake."

Something between exasperation and understanding flashes in Minato's eyes. Of course she'd known the whole time. Letting out a long breath he falls into sleep for the first time in a week.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Hokage, as it turned out, had not ordered for anyone to be moved onto the active duty roster. Once Otsuka had described the situation, the Hokage had promised to have someone look into it. She'd come ready with resources to describe specific cases where a ninja being sent on missions before they were ready had caused problems. Lines from Konoha's own requirements a ninja had to meet before they could be cleared for action. The Hokage had been impressed enough to grant her the final say on all her patient's current treatments and restrictions.

"Nara-san, maybe next time you can schedule an appointment under your own name." The Hokage smiled at her. "I feared something had gone wrong when Minato called for an emergency meeting."

A blush burned at Otsuka's face. That had probably been an abuse of power hadn't it… still she had gotten answers and results. She would not be backed into a corner. "Ah, sorry Hokage-sama. It won't happen again." Sarutobi nodded to dismiss her and Otsuka made to leave.

Before she could open the door however, it swung open. Danzo Shimura himself entered the office, with little fanfare and no introduction. Otsuka watched the man slide into the room, contempt and accusing eyes raking over her. She froze, her heart starting to race. It was all she could do to keep herself from devolving into a panic attack right there as a cold fear gripped her heart, dragging it into her stomach. She couldn't breathe, couldn't move. A rabbit who had just caught a glimpse of it's predator right before it died.

"Nara-san, thank you for your visit. You may go now." The Hokage's words snapped Otsuka out of her spiral enough for her to start to leave the room. A numbness spreading through her fingers and hands. The door closed quietly behind her as she left, greeted by Minato's concerned eyes.

"M-Mina-" Otsuka stopped as she tried to grasp onto what would ensure her safety. The Hokage was behind the door, he would protect her. But Danzo was also behind that door. And suddenly she was home. She could hear Minato whispering in her ear as he carried her

to their bedroom, but the words didn't register. The world before her phasing in and out of existence. Her vision darkened. Her fear grew and ...

Warmth. A welcoming, loving warmth. It wrapped itself around her, like an assurance. Ever so slowly her heart calmed, the numbness faded, and her gasps returned to a normal breathing. "Breathe, in, out. In, out. In, out. Good." Her vision cleared to reveal a smiling Minato. "Stay here with me, we have as much time as you need."

With something to focus on, Otsuka followed the breathing instructions, taking her time to calm herself. Minato's chakra floated around her, easing away her terror and replacing it with the feeling of love. She stays next to him on the bed, even after her panic attack faded, too exhausted to move.

She hadn't realized Danzo would have that effect on her. She had secretly hoped pushing away all of the fear and trauma would make it stop. She knew better, yet she didn't want to face it. To face the fear that started to creep up anytime she left the house, that clutched her heart when Minato or Kakashi left the house. But it wasn't fear for them, it was for herself, and she was ashamed of that. Worrying more for her own life when they left than Minato or Kakashi's lives, the two of them were far more likely to get hurt.

"How do you do it?"

Minato's eyes flickered down to his girlfriend. "Do what?"

"How do you keep yourself from panicking during a fight? You're always so calm and collected whenever something serious happens. So sure, I've always wanted that trait, to be more like you." Otsuka interlocked her fingers with Minato, she always relied on him for when she was scared. Hadn't she promised herself she would be the one to protect him and not the other way around.

"It isn't that I'm calm, but what's happening is too important for me to allow myself to panic. I've had years to practice pushing away feelings anytime I'm overwhelmed. I need to stay calm for others, for you. For Kakashi now too." His hand grips hers tighter. "I refuse to lose anyone else."

"I'm going to protect you too. I'll protect myself so you don't have to worry about me." She desperately wanted that to be true.

"I hate to break this to you, but I think I'm going to worry no matter

what Otsuka."

Otsuka laughed. She hadn't really thought about that, but she wouldn't cause the man anymore worry than she had too. Her fear was born from being powerless. She couldn't protect herself or others right now, but she was going to change that soon. Once she was off the crutches she'd be spending most of her time at work. Otsuka glanced at the man who was resting beside her.

"Hey, can we get started on those Fuinjutsu lessons?" Minato lit up.

"Of course! Before you know it we will be a family of fuinjutsu masters! Otsuka you're going to love the detail and rules. It's all like a puzzle …"

~

"That was exceptional Kakashi." Kakashi beamed at the praise, he was rather proud of his quick progression. He'd alway been exceptional at ninjutsu. After spending months slaving away at Fuinjutsu with what felt like no progress, to pick something up so easily again restored his confidence.

"Alright, let's work on something new. What's the most important thing to a ninja Kakashi?" Minato cocked his head to the side, looking at his student with a knowing smile.

"The mission."

Minato caught himself before he could frown. He hadn't been expecting that. Most genin would respond with power or chakra, but Kakashi was smart. He was more likely to respond with skill or teamwork. "Why is that?"

"Because it is a ninja's job to stake his life for the sake of the village." Kakashi said; to him this was fact. He would perform to the best of his ability to prove to those that he was not his father.

Minato wasn't quite sure what to say to his student. He should have guessed Kakashi wouldn't have been completely sheltered from the hatred his father had received. Kakashi himself probably had plenty of insults thrown his way. The thought of Kakashi suffering on his own made Minato angry. He should be having the time of his life, enjoying learning instead of worrying he wouldn't be enough.

He wasn't sure what to say to Kakashi. Kakashi was six, he absorbed

what was around him. Because the village condemned his father, to him what his father had done was fundamentally wrong. The mission came first, not your team, not what felt right. But how did one teach the importance of teammates when Kakashi didn't even have teammates yet. He'd ask Otsuka what she thought when they got home.

Otsuka. She'd changed so much in the few months it had been since he'd seen her. Where before she was uncertain and shaky, she now seemed to have a quiet confidence. Watching her interacting with Kakashi and others he could see her taking in every aspect of someone and putting it to use. She knew what buttons to push to get Kakashi excited, or what to say to shake him from his trance when he lost himself.

This morning had been strange, he'd never seen her so scared. When he'd watched Danzo come up he could barely control his anger. That man had tried to take his family away from him. The thought of living without Kakashi or Otsuka… maybe it was time.

"Kakashi, do you love Otsuka?" The question caught the young boy off guard.

"Yes." It took a moment for Kakashi to respond, but when he did his face burned.

"You would do anything to protect her?" Kakashi nodded. "What would you do if she was in trouble and you were on a mission?" It was a rather brutal question to ask a 6 year-old, but it was the same problem Kakashi's father had faced. Sakumo had made the decision that he thought had the best outcome, and if it had been Minato, he would have made the same call.

Kakashi didn't respond.

"I would save Otsuka." Minato said. "Because I could trust my teammates to take care of the mission. Because Otsuka is what's most important to me. And now, you are too." Minato smiled and reached down to ruffle Kakashi's hair. "It's been a long day, I think we should head home and go annoy Otsuka, what do you say?"

Kakashi didn't say anything, and Minato didn't say anything about the tears in Kakashi's eyes.

~

Kushina stretched, as she prepared herself for the first watch. They'd arrive at Konoha soon, and she knew she wouldn't sleep a wink from the anticipation. She hadn't seen her friends besides Minato in years. In fact Minato was the only one who even wrote her anymore, she'd have to yell at Mikoto and Otsuka for that. Still, seeing the two girls who had helped her through the hardest point in her life would be wonderful.

"Don't worry about the fire Ai-san. I've got it!" Kushina called as she watched the young ninja attempt to put out the fire without realizing it was seal activated. She reached straight into the fire and disabled the seal. Laughing at Ai's face, Kushina clapped the young ninja's back *hard.* After being told to settle down by a teammate Kushina prepared a comfy spot for herself to take watch.

The first hour passed without problem, and Kushina's mind wandered. Minato had told her he'd finally gotten up the balls to ask Otsuka out. The two of them probably made for a good couple, but she'd been dismayed to hear Mikoto had married Fugaku. She hadn't even been invited to the wedding.

Kushina didn't leave on good terms with Mikoto. Right before Kushina had left Fugaku and Mikoto had been pulled into an arranged marriage. It was only an engagement at the time, and no matter how hard Kushina had tried to get Mikoto to end it, she wouldn't. Damn the woman, Mikoto had only ever had eyes for Otsuka. No matter how hard Kushina tried to catch her attention Mikoto never once looked her way romantically.

Kushina had been sure that once Minato and Otsuka started dating Mikoto would finally look her way. Instead that bastard Fugaku had come in and taken Mikoto away from her before she had even had a chance.

Kushina sighed. Thinking about it all gave her a headache. Looking out at the forest around her she did her best to stay more focused for the rest of her watch.

Chapter End Notes

> Sorry It's been so long since I updated. It took me a while to actually get a handle on my self with the current happenings around the world. Still, I promised myself I would finish this story and I shall. Let me know what you think!

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the long wait guys, tbh I got really hung up on how short the chapter was and I didn't wanna continue to skip around. I decided to just post something so that I can move onto the next chapter and maybe get it out within the next two weeks. Pls feel free to leave any comments or critiques you have. They're always appreciated.

Mikoto frowned at her younger brother. He really knew better than to agitate Fugaku, last time he had practically caused a civil war among the Uhicha. No matter what anyone said, Fugaku had done his best to support and protect Mikoto. He didn't push for sex, he left her to her own devices anytime she asked, when she showed interest in something he'd hand it right over to her to manage. As a result she was currently handling the internal situation with Saburo, the officer currently being held in the ward for almost killing an innocent civilain.

Here Katsu was insisting that they expel Saburo from the clan. As if that would do much to repair their reputation, besides once he was proved innocent it would make the clan look even worse.

"We must prove Saburo innocent. If we were to expel him, it would make us look worse if soon after he was proven innocent." Mikoto had every faith that Otsuka would get to the bottom of things. As soon as she'd mentioned to her that she would be helping Kin out with the evaluation she knew. Otsuka had begun changing into a strong woman, she would not allow this injustice to be left alone.

Fugaku nodded at his wife's words. "There will be no more discussion on this matter. That is final." He glared at Katsu.

"But-!"

"Katsu!" Mikoto snapped. "Sit down." It was a blatant show of disrespect, and it was worse that it came from her own brother. He most likely wouldn't speak to her for the next month, but she could not let him start to break down the powerful facade Mikoto and Fugaku held. If they gave an inch, the clan would make it a mile.

~

Fuinjutsu was much easier than Otsuka had originally expected, but while she had no problems understanding the brush strokes and technique, she was laughably bad at doing anything more than copying the seal. And it would be awhile before they began going over practical fight applications. Chakra manipulation was forign to her, and because of it Minato had her using his own chakra infused ink. She would only need the smallest amount to activate the seal, and the rest could be pulled from the ink.

Minato had explained the various types of ink used in fuinjutsu to her, and most beginners used a coal infused ink that would help the chakra flow into the seal easier. It was what Kakashi was using. There were other types but not many of them were widely used. And most masters, of those proficient enough to experiment often, used their own handmade ink. A mix of chakra, ink, and other materials.

Minato made his own ink, which she had already known. He had an entire cabinet dedicated to the ink. Which was honestly more annoying than anything else but she didn't say anything. The small apartment was already filled to the brim. Kakashi and his belongings only filled half of the boys room, so Kakashi and Minato shared a desk in there, and the two bookcases were filled with fuinjutsu books and Otsuka's own psychology books.

Their own room was packed with even more books, Minato's gear and most of Otsuka's belongings. The kitchen was small, the counter only fit two people, and the couch living room was just big enough for Otsuka to spread out when studying, but it left no space for Minato of Kakashi. Kakashi had to use the bathroom in their bedroom because there wasn't another one.

The more she thought about it, the more she became desperate to move. When she thought about Mikoto's house, she wanted to cry. Mikoto had space for everything she could ever dream of, more than enough to grow a big family and have whatever she wanted.

"How do you do that so smoothly?" Kakashi was learning over Otsuka's shoulder as she worked.

"Practice, I spent a lot of my life being taught calligraphy and other fancy skills. My mother was insistent I know how to use a brush better than anyone else. Don't worry Kakashi, you have me more than beaten when it comes to theory." Otsuka slowly finished the curl of her brush, before lifting to inspect her work. Minato had only taken a few minutes to show her how to use the brush properly and she'd started

to catch on. A week later she was copying small seals that would bring water to a boiling point within a minute.

Kakashi was incredibly good himself, but he got too impatient before the seal was done. He'd been allowed to finally start on practicing exploding tags, but only outside the apartment. The young boy seated himself next to her on the floor. Content to finally rest for the first time all week.

Minato had spoken to her about the discussion he'd had with Kakashi last night. She'd been furious with him, brute forcing your way through trauma could set Kakashi back months. The boy didn't deserve the ruthless question Minato had asked. Despite almost throwing Minato out of the room, Otsuka had done her best to coach Minato through the proper ways of addressing the issue Minato was trying to solve.

And after that she'd let him have it.

"Kakashi is not you Minato." Otsuka was frowning.

"I don't think he is…?" Minato was confused. He hadn't expected her to be so angry with him, and while it was good to see she could finally express herself, he didn't want to be in an argument.

Otsuka sighed. She uncrossed her arms and turned towards Minato to fully face him on the bed. "Something happened, I don't know what it was, but clearly something major happened while you were away. You try to hide the effect it's had on you. His father killed himself because of the overwhelming hate directed towards him for caring about his teammates. What happened was horrible, and it's going to be something he struggles with his entire life. But there is a difference between telling him his father wasn't a bad person for caring about his teammates and setting Kakashi at war with himself. His father is his proof of what happens if he fails."

"Right now he thinks that your teammates will only like you for as long as you succeed. You need to show him otherwise. Try helping lead him to the right decision, not deciding for him." Otsuka sighed again, brushing some of Minato's hair behind his ear. "You called him out on it, because you think you failed, and you don't want him to do the same."

Minato didn't move a muscle.

"You can't leave that feeling unaddressed forever. Otherwise you're

going to keep unfairly calling others out and trying to fix their problems for them. Trust me, I wish I could do the same all the time. It's so much easier when you're on the outside. But it's your job to support them, and help guide them to what they need. You can certainly help them come to their own realization, but there's a time and a place."

Minato's eyes looked everywhere but at Otsuka. The feeling of a hand on his brings him back into the moment. His eyes meet Otsuka's. She looks tired, but firm. Like no matter what happens she won't let him go.

"When you're ready, I'll be right next to you." She reaches out and steadies herself on him so she can lift herself onto her knees. She positions herself in front of him and reaches around his head to untie his hitai-ate. Slowly untangling the fabric from his hair, Otsuka places it on the counter. Before she can move again, Minato grips her forearm.

His eyebrows are furrowed, and Otsuka can tell he's too caught in his own thoughts to really say anything. Still, she only moves enough to adjust herself so she can lay into his side and pulls the blanket up around them.

Outside, rain begins to pour.

~

Kushina arrives in Konoha with a loud yell. She'd been so excited to see the walls of her second home for the first time in years, she'd just dashed forward before she even realized she was moving. It was then she realized she hadn't actually told anyone she was coming, but she brushed off the plummet her good mood had taken, and relished in the fact this would give her the perfect opportunity to pull all sorts of pranks on her friends.

She doesn't bother to show any proof of identity to the two chunin waiting at the gate, her Uzu Hitai-ate along with her bright red hair should be enough for them to recognize her. She was certain they'd heard tales of her. Shooting past the gate she heads towards the Uchiha compound. She had a woman to annoy the hell out of.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

> Thank so much for your wonderful comments. It makes me unspeakably happy to know you guys are enjoying this story as much as I am. I'm also glad I could get this chapter out in a reasonable amount of time.

Otsuka was officially back at work for full time. And the moment she stepped into the office she knew she had a very long day ahead of her. She was tentatively off crutches, she still had them with her of course, and Kakashi and Minato had both insisted on walking her to work. It takes her two whole minutes to even get to her office with all the greetings and congratulations everyone in the building gave her.

“Otsuka, welcome back!” Kin greets as he sees her start to head into her own office. He stands and follows her into her office, laughing when Otsuka stops seeing the stacks of paperwork laying across her desk. “Don’t worry, you’ll get used to the massive amounts of paperwork.” Kin closes the door to her office as he speaks.

Resting her crutches against the wall, Otsuka seats herself at her desk and pulls the first file from the top. “First full day back and I’m already swamped.” Otsuka suddenly wishes her hours of studying Fūinjutsu had been spent doing work at home.

“You’ll get used to it. Besides, you will need to get everything in order for your new branch.”

“Speaking of what are we calling my PTSD ninja care?” Otsuka flips the page of what she was reading. Someone had been so thoughtful as to create an entire list of things she would need to do. “And who made this?”

Kin gives her a sickeningly sweet smile. “My secretary, Otsuka-san I must warn you if you try to steal my precious-“

Otsuka levels him with a stare. “Don’t worry, I’m not after a secretary, yet. But it's on the list, you’ll have to thank them for me. I don’t think I would have been able to handle it all myself.”

Kin stays suspicious and seats himself in the chair meant for patients. It was in the corner allowing the shinobi to see both the door,

window, and desk. “Well actually I believe the Hokage’s official suggestion was “Mental Rehab for Shinobi”, but I get the feeling you could come up with something better.”

Otsuka wanted to face palm, she was given the full power to create an entire medical branch and the Hokage wanted to call it rehab. She was fairly certain they’d never get another shinobi in the building again if they called anything rehab.

“I’ll start brainstorming and come back to you tomorrow.” Otsuka fiddled with the paper in front of her as she thought. First, she wanted to know why she was suddenly being trusted with the mental health of Konoha’s entire shinobi corps. Beyond that, she was thinking with despair about the hours of pouring over laws and regulations she was about to spend just to make sure she wasn’t breaking any laws while creating her new medical branch.

“Well I’ll leave you to it, I’m still deciding who I’m willing to lose to you so expect the list of counselors you can take tomorrow.” Kin stood to leave.

“Just remember you’re the one who picked me. If I lose my mind, you’re the one who gets to deal with Minato.”

“Oh don’t remind me.”

“Kin, do you mind telling me why exactly I’m being allowed free reign over the mental treatment of the entirety of Konoha’s shinobi corps?”

Kin stops, turning and giving her a grim smile. “Don’t mess up, Otsuka.” The door closes behind him softly. The minute it does Otsuka’s heart is pounding.

Her breath picks up, and Otsuka’s world is already beginning to spin.

She can’t quite steady herself. She could fail. She might fail. And who was she failing?

The file she was reading hits the floor with a loud smack. The papers are across her floor now.

It only furthers the spiral. There’s a buzz in her head as she grips the desk.

She latches on to what she learned, what she remembers. She studies the desk in front of her. It’s brown, probably made from oak. The

surface is smooth, but it smells slightly like cleaning products. She had stopped by two days ago to clean her office before she started work again. Kakashi had sneezed about ten different times when he was cleaning the harder to reach corners of her office.

She smiles at the memory and latches onto the happy feeling it gives her. She slows her breaths and allows herself to return to the moment at hand. Pushing herself away from the desk, Otsuka takes her time to lift herself out of the spiral.

Last night Kakashi had presented his first finished theoretical seal to Minato. He'd been anxious about it all day. And once dinner had been finished, he'd raised his hand to ask a question. It sent Minato into a laughing fit, and Otsuka had just barely been able to cover her own laugh. Still, Kakashi had run into his room and came back with a seal, it was done in pen so as to ensure the thing couldn't be activated.

Minato had gushed over it, and spent the rest of the night praising Kakashi. Otsuka was fairly certain he wanted to go shout from the rooftops about Kakashi's accomplishment. And while Otsuka knew Minato was still beating himself up over what he had said to Kakashi, she knew the praise and love was genuine.

The two boys, her two boys, had discussed theory for the rest of the night. Seeing the smile on both of their faces had been everything. She could do this, for them. For them, she was certain she could do anything.

~

The sun was beginning to set when Otsuka first heard her. Her voice echoed through the hall and her laugh was unmistakable. Two seconds later the redhead had burst through the door to her office. "OTSUKA!!" Kushina rushed forward to sweep the woman before her into a large hug. Otsuka returned the hug, barely managing to close the file she was working on.

"It's so good to see you Kushina, it's been years." The red head pulled away. Looking her over, Kushina's grin faded slightly. It's as she opens her nought to say something Otsuka stops her. "Please don't worry about my injury, I'm fine."

Something strange swirls in Kushina's eyes but Otsuka ignores it in favor of laughing at a soaked Minato who has just appeared in her office. He looked quite a lot like a drowned rat. Glaring at Kushina while he drips water onto Otsuka's newly cleaned office floors, Minato

huffs.

“Oh you big baby it was just a little water.” Kushina is back to smiling.

“‘A little’ she says.” Minato flops into a cushioned chair and Otsuka winces.

“Minato that chair is expensive, and not actually *mine* .” Minato is back up in a split second and pretending he has nothing to do with the chair that’s now soaked. “Also Kushina.” She holds up a hand for a hive five and Kushina obliges, laughing.

“Otsuka we have a lot to catch up on! But first, I need someplace to escape from Mikoto’s wrath.”

“Oh what did you do?” Otsuka can already hear Mikoto screaming in her head.

“She dyed her hair pink. It actually kind of suits her.” Minato supplies from the corner, where he’s doing his best to avoid dripping on anything but the floor.

Otsuka stops. If Kushina actually pranked Mikoto herself and not Fugaku someone was not happy with the Uchiha. And then something clicks in her head. Minato was probably the only one who had actually kept in contact with Kushina. And suddenly Otsuka wishes she could kick her own ass.

“Minato, please go drip in someone else’s office.” Otsuka smirks at her boyfriend. And years of knowing Otsuka must be what tells him what she plans on doing. Because the man looks like he’s beaming when he leaves her office.

And once Minato is gone Otsuka turns to Kushina and bows as deep as her wound will allow. Which admittedly is not far, but she pushes herself anyway. Ignoring the sensation of sharp pain and the fact that her legs are shaking Otsuka apologizes. “Kushina I am so sorry I didn’t stay in contact with you. We were close friends, I should have been responding to your letters.”

Kushina doesn’t say anything but Otsuka can hear the small sniffle. It takes a few seconds but finally Kushina says. “Just, respond to my letters next time okay?” When Otsuka pushes herself back up, she does it knowing she has a lot to make up for. The apology won’t fix everything, but right now it doesn’t matter because Kushina is crying.

Otsuka steps forward to wrap her arms around Kushina as the woman sobs into her arms. It reaffirms Otsuka in her decision. She wasn't sure why she had so easily let it go, but she was going to hold onto what was important.

Otsuka ended up offering Kushina their couch, as cramped as it would be, but was surprised to learn Mikoto had insisted she stay in the compound. Otsuka had the feeling she was not the only one who was determined to never forget again.

Kushina insisted on walking Otsuka home. They decided they would need to do a large dinner, and Otsuka spent half the walk home gushing over Kakashi. The Uzumaki had laughed and assured her she'd heard all this from Minato. From there the conversation took an unexpected turn for Otsuka.

"So when are you two getting married?"

Otsuka stopped, "Married? We haven't talked about it all." Otsuka continued forward. "Though I have been thinking about asking Minato what he thinks about us looking for a house. With Kakashi and the two of us it's a crowded apartment."

"What do you think about getting married to him?" Kushina asks, her smile is wide and she pokes Otsuka's arm while she waits for her to respond.

A minute of silence passes and Otsuka finally responds. "I think it would be wonderful."

~

"Reporting Sir!" Danzo looks at the Root member and nods to let him know he may speak. "The Suna nin were hindered from aiding Rain, as you asked, and we have received confirmation from the branch team that they have successfully recovered Rumi Uchiha's body."

"Wonderful, have it brought here as quickly as possible." Danzo dismissed the nin and pulled out the results Orochimaru had sent him. Most of them were failures, but there was one notable success. Orochimaru had promised further experimentation as long as Danzo brought him the samples of Hashirama's cells.

Danzo was not at all planning to provide them, but he would send out two of his nin to pretend to look, and while they pretended to look they could see if they'd be able to retrieve Uchiha Hoshino's sharingan. His body had been reported as burned, but after being able to recover another Uchiha's half burned sharingan, Danzo had learned his lesson.

But before Danzo would send those in out, he needed Orochimaru to complete one more task for him. It was dangerous, sure, but at this point it was more a matter of pride. He would succeed at this, bringing another powerful shinobi into his fold, and in a few years time he'd be set to take over as Hokage.

Danzo rather thought Yondime had a nice ring to it. Maybe not as good as Sandime might have been, but he'd make do.

"Mouse!" The root nin in question took less than a second to appear before Danzo. "Tell Orochimaru it's time. After that I'll give him the cells he wants so badly." He wouldn't, but Orochimaru hardly needed to know that.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

> I have no idea why I suddenly decided I only like to write Juxtaposition. You must know by now, another chapter means another emotional state to try to make sense of, however I have a surprise. I'm finally picking back up those plot threads from like a ton of chapters ago.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kakashi wasn't sure when he decided it. Still, he was here now. The sky was bright and shining, sun high over Konoha. It had rained the night before and now everything was looking new. The gravestone before him was still wet, dew collected on the very top and in the crevices of the engraved letters.

Sakumo Hatake

The name struck a chord in Kakashi's heart. It was anger, it was grief, frustration and love. It was a bittersweet mix of feelings.

He was gone, and that wasn't okay. He'd left him alone to fend for himself, that wasn't okay either. Kakashi was angry. It bubbled in him when he thought about how many times he'd been passed over for a mission. His mind reasoned that his father was trying to make the right decision anytime he picked a mission over his son. His heart said his anger was wrong, that he couldn't possibly be angry at his father, it wasn't fair.

There was a choice standing before Kakashi. Anger or grief? The feelings fought with each other, each bringing more guilt as Kakashi mourned and raged at the same time. There were moments when one won out over the other, and others where everything was too muddled to comprehend anything.

The sun shone in the sky, burning bright. The stone slate marking a burial sparkled in the sunshine. The dew was quickly drying up, and before long the only proof left that it had rained would be the moisture still in the air.

Staring at his father's name, Kakashi didn't move from his spot. He was too unspeakably angry to move. He wanted to destroy his father's stone, to demonstrate to everyone that he was not his father. Atone for a decision he didn't decide. He would not dent and break.

Staring at his father's name, Kakashi didn't move from his spot. He was too unspeakably sad to move. He wanted to slip into bed, and sob until he couldn't. Secretly wishing his father would slip into his room and remind him he was safe and sound. Sometimes Kakashi thought he understood.

Four months, four months had passed.

He's too wrapped up in his own thoughts to notice the shadow following him as he leaves.

~

Otsuka wasn't sure when she noticed exactly, but at some point that night she'd begun to realize something was worrying Minato. She'd come home to Kakashi studying, and Minato was looking over a seal. It was clear to her both of them had already had dinner, but the moment she opened the door Minato was up and helping her carry the work she'd brought home to the table. Then he was getting more food ready. Soon after he'd made tea and the entire night he'd poured her a new cup of tea before she even realized she needed a refill.

Kakashi had helped her look over a few of the law books, and taken notes she could reference for about two hours. The entire time Minato had gotten up and moved to check what Kakashi was doing, or picked up one of the books to help, and he never really actually touched the seal he left alone on the counter.

When Kakashi had gone back to his room, Minato spent the majority of his time standing up to go check on something or checking over Kakashi and her own notes. It was about the tenth time Minato had stood up to go check some random thing that Otsuka finally said something. "What's on your mind?"

Minato stops what he's doing to turn around a smile at her. "Nothing."

“I’m not sure who exactly you think you’re fooling.” Otsuka smiles at him, setting her book down on the coffee table. She watches him debate with himself, before he finally seems to give up and comes to sit next to her on the couch. He looks almost deflated.

He mumbles something she can’t hear.

“Wait, I couldn’t hear you. Say that again.”

“Kushina and I are leaving on a two week long assignment at the end of the month.” He says louder this time. The look he gives her is a mix between worry and anguish. It makes Otsuka want to scoop him up and hide him away from anything that could ever hurt him.

“Are you going to be okay?” Minato is surprised by her words, and he takes a moment to think her question over.

“Yes, but I don’t want to leave you alone again.” His tone is fierce and Otsuka can tell he’s been worrying about this all day.

“I’ll be alright Minato. I’m sure Mikoto will check up on me a million times while you’re gone, and I can always pester Shikaku or Kin.” Otsuka reaches forward to brush his cheek with her hand.

Minato frowns, “You’re about to start up an entire workforce Otsuka, it’s a perfect opportunity for someone to come back and finish what they started. You’ll be vulnerable, and-”

Otsuka stops his train of thought with a light tug on one of the longer strands of his hair. “I’m sure Kushina and you could come up with some seal to make sure I’m protected. Besides, I think Mikoto might force Fugaku to stick an entire KPD unit on me for protection. We have the time to work out the finer details, and I’m sure Yoshino would love to have Kakashi and I stay over at the Nara compound for two weeks.”

Minato gives her a small smile. “I’m going to protect you, no matter what Otsuka.”

“I know.” Otsuka watches him, and can only hope he will come back safe and sound. Only hope that nothing would tear more at his mind than it already had, but she knew it wasn’t likely.

The young man before her reaches out to push some hair out of her face. “I love you.” He’s giving her a blinding smile. Otsuka only nods, entranced in the look he was giving her.

“When did you get so handsome?”

Minato shrugs, doing his best to keep down his smile. “What do you mean? I’ve always looked like this.” He stands and helps Otsuka up. “Come on, you can finish this later.”

Smiling, the beautiful woman before him kisses him softly. “What are we going to do instead?”

Pulling her into his arms Minato returns the kiss. “Oh I can think of a few things.”

~

Kushina picked at her nails as she waited for Mikoto. She hardly understood why Fugaku had to take up SO much of her time. She wouldn’t have much time left to spend with Mikoto, and Kushina was determined to make every second count.

“You know sighing every other second won’t make her come back any faster.” Kushina glared at Minato. He was seated at the table, legs folded under him, looking smug and proud of the reaction he had elicited out of Kushina. The Uzumaki just huffed and started glaring at the sliding door Mikoto had disappeared behind several minutes ago. “Glaring a hole through the door might though, good thinking.”

Kushina felt like screaming. Snatching up the pillow beside her, Kushina launched it at the blond. “You insufferable asshole!”

Minato caught the pillow, and placed it beside him. “I’m wonderful, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” The smirk on his face dissolved however when his eyes looked at the table before him. “Your work is incredible.”

Kushina scoffed. “Of course it is.” Her eyes flicked from the door, to the table, to Minato. Voice softening, “Minato, have you really thought this through? You’ll be undermining the Hokage not telling him about placing this seal in the village, and while I will always be on your side, Uzugakure cannot protect you from the Hokage’s wrath.”

Minato met Kushina’s eyes, he looked like he had just emerged from Hell. “I will protect my family Kushina.”

The door slid open, and Mikoto re-entered the room. She took in the situation without pause, and seated herself next to Kushina. “Kushina,

Minato and I have made our decision. You need not worry about our resolve." Mikoto had never bothered to ask if Kushina was sure that she wanted to participate. She was certain of Kushina's loyalty.

The seal before them on the table was the fruit of a month of Kushina's freetime. The product of a discussion Otsuka and Mikoto had, had in her kitchen well over three months ago. Danzo had a bleak future ahead of him, because the two adults who loved Otsuka most in the world, had decided that nothing would keep them from obliterating him.

Because Minato finally had a family.

Because Mikoto still had a family.

Because Shikaku had stumbled onto something resembling proof that the civilian who had been paralyzed by a member of the police force might actually be a member of Root.

Because Inoichi decided that something was off about the mission Sakumo had gone on. That the intel from Sakumo in his therapy sessions, and the mission reports didn't match up.

"Minato, are you certain you've set up enough precautions for Otsuka? Danzo might try to snatch up Kakashi one last time before it's too late." Mikoto was frowning. She was not happy that Otsuka would be left alone again so soon.

"I've taken care of it, Jiraiya was coming back home anyhow, and he said he didn't mind watching over her while he's back. The more pressing matter is how we are going to keep this," he motioned to the seal in front of him, "from being noticed. It will need time to activate and release enough of the nine tails chakra to go unnoticed but still be effective."

"Well, I've never known my cousin to be anything but loyal to his family first and foremost. When he says he can figure out a way to ensure no one notices it, I believe him." Mikoto said.

"Oh, how is his little one? I haven't seen Obito in ages." Kushina cut in, she could see the tension in the room building. When Minato noticed Mikoto had more than just a crush on Otsuka, Kushina wasn't sure. But she was certain he knew now.

Chapter End Notes

Interesting fact, originally I had written for the first chapter to be Minato dying and the rest of the story exploring his character in past moments but then I wrote what is the actual first chapter and inspired myself to write a completely different story.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next night Jiraiya was greeted by his student by Konoha's gate. He was here to look after his student's family more than deliver any information to the Hokage, but he had told Minato he was due to head back anyway.

He would do anything for Minato if he asked. It was probably unfair to both of his other former students, Fugaku and Hiashi, but Jiraiya couldn't find it in himself to care.

Jiraiya had always liked Otsuka, maybe at first it was because she seemed to be solely focused on Minato and family. And codependency or not, Jiraiya had wanted Minato to feel loved and cared for. Otsuka filled a hole Jiraiya himself could not. As long as she didn't hurt his student, he could've cared less.

He watched Minato fall in love with a doting and caring girl, and he never saw a problem. Well he hadn't seen a problem until Otsuka's mother had died. As it happened, he had known her mother well enough, fought with her on the battlefield enough times to know the woman was more paranoid than most ninja. The funeral had been strange. He honestly couldn't say exactly what he had expected.

Jiraiya was not a mothering person, he was never close. Otsuka's mother, Hanayo-san, she'd been that way too. He'd just never realized that this might affect her funeral. It had been a surreal feeling. Would his own funeral be so lonely? He hadn't wanted to know.

The weirdest part was that there were more people there to comfort Otsuka than there were to pay respects to Hanayo-san. It was then he had noticed. The way she stood there, nothing seemed to reach her. She was somewhere else. He watched Minato try to get her to eat, Mikoto practically begged Otsuka to say something.

Later that day Minato had confided in him that he was worried for Otsuka, and by then Jiraiya had already figured it out. Otsuka lived for others, and not for herself. He had been surprised to hear she had been assigned to create and run an entire new division. It was a position of high power, and it would be easy to make a mistake. She'd

be overseeing the health and care of every ninja to ever come back from war.

But the choice made sense for her. She'd been helping people, it was all she ever seemed to want to do. He just hoped she could handle it. If things went wrong, she'd probably end up being investigated and underwatch for the rest of her life.

"Thanks so much sensei." Minato looked exhausted and he hadn't even left on his mission yet. "I feel much better knowing you'll be looking after them."

"Of course, anything for my favorite student!" Jiraiya was smiling and laughing, but on the inside he wasn't looking forward to two weeks of Minato's despondent girlfriend and traumatized student. It reminded him of that funeral. It reminded him how alone he was. "Besides, I've been waiting to meet this cute little student of yours!"

Minato smiled at his teacher, falling into step with him as they moved towards the Hokage tower. "So how was the last stretch of your trip?"

"Well I met this brunette beauty who had this way with her-"

"Sensei…" Minato's face dropped and the ninja sighed. "That was *not* what I meant."

Jiraiya opened his mouth to respond but stopped when he heard the call.

"Minato! Jiraiya-san!" It was late and the sun had already begun to set. Her voice was distinctive enough that Jiraiya had known who it was the moment she spoke the first syllable. What worried him was that he actually hadn't sensed her until she called out to them. He gave Minato a flat look, and received a sheepish one in return. He hadn't thought his student was the type to use suppressing seals on his girlfriend. Was the situation that bad?

"Otsuka-chan!" Jiraiya turned and smiled wide. He caught the small limp in her step. So she wasn't completely healed, or maybe she would in fact be stuck with it.

"Hello Jiraiya-san, it's good to see you after so long." Her voice was breathy and slightly rushed, as if she'd just finished running. The woman's stare was slightly off, sharper than he'd remembered. He could tell she held herself with more confidence. Still, she looked worried.

Her gaze turned onto her boyfriend and her face shifted from the tight smile she'd given him. "Have you seen Kakashi in a while? I left before he woke this morning but yesterday he said he was going to walk me home from work. I waited for forty minutes."

Minato froze. "I gave him the day off, he told me he was going to spend it with you at the office." Jiraiya had a sinking feeling that the dinner he had planned with his student's family was going to be put on hold.

"I'll go get Mikoto and Kushina." And just like that Otsuka was running down the street, neither her limp or long skirt hindering her.

"Sensei, I know you need to-" Jiraiya waved away Minato.

"He can wait, we have to find Kakashi-kun. Where should we look first?"

The first few hours produced nothing. And with every minute that passed Jiraiya became more certain that there was something Minato had failed to tell him. He caught the look his student shared with Kushina when they ran into her. He watched Fugaku and his young apprentice; *was that a young Nara?* , speak with Otsuka in hushed tones. Within ten minutes the entire KPD had been alerted to the missing child and had begun combing the streets.

Fugaku, despite how much he'd calmed down over the years, had never been one to compromise his pride. It had been the thing Jiraiya had struggled with the most with between Fugaku and Hiashi. A Nara in the KPD? Something must have happened to prove to Fugaku that he could no longer rely only on the Uchiha's pride.

20 minutes later Shikaku, Inoichi, Choza, and a yamanaka he didn't recognize had descended upon Minato's small apartment. All of them were alert and ready to move.

While Kakashi was a young and promising academy student, Jiraiya wasn't certain he deserved the extent of the reaction he was receiving. Even if Minato was already teaching him. Since when had Minato solidified such a firm group of people who were willing to help him find the small genin on their own free time, without the request of the Hokage. Maybe Minato would be taking up the Hokage's mantle much sooner than he had initially thought.

It was then he saw it. When a determined Shikaku turned to her, waiting for orders. One of Konoha's greatest geniuses, looking to his

civilian cousin to dictate the next move. And suddenly everything fell into place.

It was never Otsuka following Minato. It had always been Minato following Otsuka.

~

Otsuka felt like she should have been falling apart at the seams, instead she was deadly calm. Every fiber of her being was focused. She needed to find Kakashi.

She had thought something might be wrong when he didn't show up for the first few minutes, but she excused the lateness away as Minato losing track of time. Then more time passed and her worry had grown, but she'd pushed back the anxiety and panic that was growing in her and waited longer.

She tried to wait it out past thirty minutes but Otsuka was worried out of her mind. So she went home, and prayed to kami Kakashi and Minato would be waiting for her at home. Prayed that just this once Kakashi and Minato had forgotten about her.

She'd come home to an empty apartment and almost screamed. But then, Minato wasn't home, which meant it was more than likely the two were just out together. Otsuka's own excuses didn't put to rest the *rotten* feeling that was growing in her stomach. So she set out to find the two, and it was on the way to the training fields she saw the two of them.

Her blood ran cold. No, he had to be okay. Maybe he was with Gai? He could have been picking up food and got stuck in a line.

She knew neither of those things were true. Still she had called out to Jiraiya and Minato and hoped, but Minato's face had said it all.

She ran to Kushina and Mikoto. She'd barged into the Uchiha compound crying. She wanted to pretend it was just from the pain of running this far. While she had freaked out both her friends, they'd instantly jumped into action. Kushina had escorted her home, and Mikoto had promised to be over as soon as she had notified Fugaku.

Jiraiya had shown up shortly after, and relayed that Minato had asked him to stay with her to ensure Otsuka was safe. Otsuka had pushed to try to get him to go out and help Minato, but the sannin hadn't budged.

Fugaku and Mikoto showed up together, the young Nara apprentice in tow. Two minutes later Shikaku was at the door with his team and Kin behind him.

Left to handle the situation she sent Kushina to Sakumo's grave site and the Hatake compound. Fugaku had asked her what the KPD should be looking for exactly, and she trusted him to handle searching the village.

But she knew where Kakashi really was. She was certain of it. And Danzo had another thing coming if he thought he could kidnap him from under their noses and get away with it. The real question was how did she get to him from where she was.

She needed to get Danzo out of the woodwork. The fuss the KPD were making around the village would catch The Hokage's attention. While he could call the searches off, she knew the Hokage must know that Danzo was behind this. As long as she made a big enough fuss that it would actually cause a stir, The Hokage would be forced to do something to quiet the Village down.

Whether or not Kakashi would be allowed to say anything after was questionable, but she would get him back. That would be enough for now.

~

To say Hiruzen was not happy with Danzo would be putting it lightly. The Hokage was fuming. He had turned a blind eye to the fact that Danzo had another organization he was using in the dark for a long time. He excused the way his old friend acted, what he did in the shadows. He didn't want to know. He wanted to believe that Danzo was doing what was right for the village.

But then Otsuka Nara and Kakashi Hatake had been attacked by a supposed nuke-nin. He had counted his lucky stars that there had happened to be a few members of the police department around. The recently retired Nara clan head had been kind enough to bring it to Hiruzen's attention that Danzo had been making moves to try and claim the young Hatake.

Now Kakashi Hatake was missing, and Hiruzen was doing his best to

remember why he had ever let Danzo take the reins of Konoha's darker parts. There was a knock at the door. "Come in." The Hokage answered.

"Hiruzen, you wanted me?" Danzo practically floated into the room, clearly he was happy about something. Even if he tried to hide it behind his frail act. The retired ninja had always been confident in his ability to command the room, and it gave Danzo away. But he was not Hokage here. Hiruzen felt the anger in him grow tenfold. Had he really been this blind?

"Where is Kakashi Hatake?" The Hokage demanded. Danzo didn't even blink. Hiruzen wondered when the position of Hokage had become such a chore. He couldn't wait to be free of this damn hat and push it all onto Namikaze.

"I do not know *where* he is, I am perturbed that you would think I would keep his whereabouts from you." Danzo said. Leaning further into his cane, he had the gall to look afronted by the Hokage's question.

"Do not lie to me Danzo. I've turned a blind eye for this long. This however, has convinced me that my choice was wrong." Danzo stood up straighter. His attempt to look weak was thrown to the side. The act had never worked with Hiruzen anyway.

The look in Danzo's eyes was enough to make the Hokage's stomach churn. Just what had Hiruzen missed. Suddenly he didn't want to know anymore.

"I do not know where the boy is." Danzo met the Hokage's glaring eyes. He was calm, a darkness swirling about him. "The fact that he has disappeared from right under the noses of the KPD is troubling indeed. The Uchiha are supposed to be patrolling the city and ensuring things like this don't happen."

If Hiruzen had, had any doubt that Danzo was involved in this before, he didn't have any now.

~

Kakashi's day had started out bad. He'd woken up late, and then

Sensei had dismissed him from training. Saying something about making sure Kakashi got a break and rested. Sensei had been training Kakashi hard, and he had said Jiraiya would be overseeing his training while he was gone for the two weeks.

The prospect of being trained by a sannin lifted his spirits. He decided he would spend the day with Otsuka- no. He would spend the day with Oba-san. He'd been trying to get used to the nickname in his head before he dared call her it out loud again.

Otsuka's office was far enough away from their apartment that he had decided to just take a few back streets. Besides, it kept him away from the whispering and staring. He'd made it about halfway there before he noticed something was weird. At first it was just a gut feeling. His steps didn't falter but then he noticed, the street he had turned onto was the same street. Every turn he took led him right back to where he was.

Genjutsu.

The young ninja stopped and assessed the situation. The best way to dispel a genjutsu was with Chakra disruption. It shouldn't be too hard, he'd practiced with Minato-sensei a few times. The genjutsu were never big or particularly hard but they had always been visual. And this must have been a visual genjutsu. He focused internally, gathering chakra and then expelling it. "Kai!"

He opened his eyes to find himself still on the same street. He tried again. It failed. Maybe there was another way. He had his ink and brush on him. It was dangerous to be creating a seal for something he didn't totally understand, but it was his best shot right now. So he sat down and tried to recall every piece of information he'd been taught.

He remembered something about visual genjutsu in one of Minato-sensei's books. It was a seal that was used to change the look of a shop front. This way shops could decorate for seasons without having to spend the extra money. If he could reverse engineer that seal, maybe it could get him out of this?

What he remembered of what that seal had looked like was fuzzy, but he could guess. Between trying to work around what pieces he'd forgotten and figured out how to actually reverse engineer a seal Kakashi kept trying to push the fear and panic that bubbled back down.

Oba-san wouldn't be scared. Sensei wouldn't be scared. Gai wouldn't

be scared. So why was he scared? He wasn't.

The easiest way Kakashi could figure to make a seal that would break the genjutsu was to focus on restoring the world to what it should look like. Minato-sensei always said that fuinjutsu could be whatever you wanted it to be, you just had to know how to manipulate it. So, Kakashi reasoned, if he could make the seal tell his body to see what the world *actually* looked like he'd be free of the genjutsu.

While what he came up with was crude and would have to be rather large, Kakashi figured it could still work. The problem was he didn't have enough parchment on him for that to work so he was left with the ground he was standing on.

The cobblestone path was hard to paint on, but Kakashi did his best anyhow. The brush wouldn't go between the stones without sending the bristles of his brush into disarray. It made the lines squiggly and wrong. Everytime he messed up a stroke his hands shook more, but Kakashi kept going. Oba-san would give up. Sensei would know what to do. He could figure this out. He had to figure this out. He needed to get out of this genjutsu. He wanted to go home.

After the hundredth time of messing up a stroke, Kakashi began to cry. Sensei wouldn't cry. Gai wouldn't cry. Oba-san wouldn't cry. So why was he crying? He didn't know.

Kakashi kept working.

At last he was finished, he had no idea how much time had actually past but it felt like *days* . He just wanted, more than anything he'd ever wanted, *to go home.* Still he checked his work. Sensei had drilled it into him to *always* check his work, or it could kill him. Of course sensei had also said not to experiment with seals until he was more experienced. He wasn't even allowed to use the seals he copied unless they'd been checked over. Kakashi figured Minato-sensei might not mind so much right now if it got him out of this genjutsu alive.

The thought of dying made Kakashi pause. If he messed this up he could die. He might die anyway. The six year old sat there for a moment, reeling from the thought of death. Kakashi resolved to make sure he triple checked the seal before he used it.

It took a while, he'd caught a few mistakes which meant he had to extend the seal even further, but at this point he had time. He couldn't sense anything, and no one had come to threaten him. He had no idea what would happen once he got out of this. He forced himself to go

back to focusing on the seal.

And then it was done. He couldn't find anything wrong. So it was time.

Kakashi wasn't sure he was ready. But he didn't have a choice.

So he forced as much chakra into the seal as he could and prayed.

The street fell away.

It worked.

He was shrouded in darkness.

Where was he?

He was laying on a cold floor.

Kakashi tried to get up.

He didn't move.

He had to-

His thoughts weren't working.

There was the sound. Footsteps.

Kakashi still couldn't move from where he was on the floor. A face appeared in his vision. He recognized the face but he couldn't place where it was from.

"Interesting. I didn't know you knew fuinjutsu Hatake-kun." There was a pause. "We will try again tomorrow." The face smiled.

Chapter End Notes

I really really wanted to give you a longer chapter, and I'm glad to say I have. I think I'm going to start looking for a beat if any of you are interested? Let me know what you thought of the chapter, I'm really interested to hear your thoughts. I gotta say I LOVED writing for Jiraiya. He's such an interesting character to explore. I'm also getting addicted to writing for a baby Kakashi.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

> Hi everyone, because college is in full swing it might start being once a month I update. There's so much work lol. I hope you enjoy this chapter and feel to let me know your thoughts. I always enjoy reading your comments!

Obito Uchiha liked to tell himself that this would be the last time he had a nightmare every time he went to bed. Like every other night, he was wrong. So when Obito woke crying he'd expected his father to come and open up the door like he always did. Kenta Uchiha did not come and open the door and Obito cried harder. He just wanted his dad to come back from his mission already.

It took a few minutes for the tiny boy to calm down. This nightmare had been particularly bad, he'd tried to save his dad from dying and instead watched the man die in front of him due to his own mistake. Everyone at school called him clumsy, and it seemed to Obito that he was just born a bad ninja. He wouldn't give up though, his dad always said perseverance is the key to success. Truthfully Obito only partially understood that, but he knew that he shouldn't give up. Obito would just have to work harder than everyone else to catch up faster.

With that in mind, Obito pondered if his father would be back in time for his next math test. He needed help understanding just how fractions worked. By that point he was awake enough to realize he was hungry. So he got up and made his way to the kitchen, taking his blanket with him.

He pulled out one of the snack containers that held something his father had made for him before he left for his mission. Oto-san always made food for Obito when he left and labeled it. There was everything from breakfast, midday dessert, to late night snacks. Mikoto-oba-san always called his dad "Anal", whatever that meant. Still, Obito was running out of late night snack containers.

Obtio briefly considered sitting at the kitchen table but when he spotted that all of the lights were on in the Uchiha compound he decided he wanted to go outside. Covered by a large blue blanket that trailed behind him like a cape and with a snack in hand, Obito slipped into his shoes and ventured down the steps of his porch and onto the smooth cobblestone. It was just starting to get colder outside as fall

was pushing summer away.

While the street lights were on, so were most of the lights of the other houses that were on Obito's street. It was odd considering that it was the middle of the night. Still, Obito thought it might be a good idea to check with some of his neighbors that everything was alright. Oto-san would probably prefer to hear that Obito had been responsible and taken precautions rather than just assuming. He always said assuming could get a ninja killed.

Obito walked to Hiro-san's house, and knocked as loudly as he could. Hiro-san was an older retired ninja who lived alone, and was supposed to check up on Obito anytime his father left on a mission, which was often. So when something was wrong, Obito was supposed to go straight to Hiro-san's house.

There was no answer and Obito frowned. Hiro-san was always home or at the tea shop that wasn't open this late. For a moment he considered barging in to check on Hiro-san, but he might be hurt by any of the traps Hiro-san set up around his house to ward off intruders. Obito decided that Hiro-san *must* be at the tea shop. It wasn't that far if you cut through the forest that bordered the Uchiha compound and the smaller market.

So Obito was off, heading to the forest he would cut through to go pick up Hiro-san from the tea shop.

~

Minato thought his heart might explode. He needed to find Kakashi, he couldn't have failed again. He would not fail his student. He would not fail his family. The ninja cursed himself for not realizing Kakashi's absence sooner. He'd almost gone and visited Otsuka and Kakashi for lunch. Instead he got wrapped up in working out his new jutsu. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

If Kakashi was dead Minato would never forgive himself. Minato had searched through the area surrounding their apartment all the way to Otsuka's workplace before he decided he needed a different tactic. He wasn't good enough at sage mode for him to be able to successfully use the Natural Chakra to help his search. In the corner of his eye he could see the light on in the Hokage tower. He was near the tower in a

matter of seconds and making his way up the stairs.

Minato didn't bother knocking, something he'd have to hope Hokage-sama would forgive him for later. But at the moment he didn't care enough to stop himself before he'd pushed past the door. The door swung open and Minato barely caught the last of Danzo's sentence.

"-The Uchiha are supposed to be patrolling the city and ensuring things like this don't happen." The man didn't react to Minato stroming in, or the glare that was level at him by both current and future Hokage's.

The room was silent for a few more seconds before the Hokage moved to give Minato a glare of his own. "I am aware of the situation Minato, but you should remember that you cannot barge into my office." Hiruzen growled.

Minato glared at Danzo for a few more seconds before slowly meeting the Hokage's gaze and dropping into a bow. "Forgive me Hokage-sama." The anger in him was bubbling up, what he'd heard alone was enough for him to be certain Danzo knew *exactly* where Kakashi was. After a few moments of silence Minato stood again, eyes trained on Danzo. "Kakashi's disappearance has me flustered, I will make sure it does not happen again."

What had Danzo done to his student? Where could he have hidden Kakashi away that Minato couldn't even feel the hiraishin seal he'd placed on Kakashi? There hadn't been enough time that Kakashi would be out of the land of Fire's borders, and Danzo would never take him that far.

"Namikaze-san, if you're letting your emotions take you over then maybe you should take more time away from work. Is teaching adding that much of a strain on you?"

"I find that teaching has actually relieved quite a lot of my stress Danzo-" Minato paused, "sama." The disrespect was clear and Danzo's eyes seemed to flare but the Hokage didn't say anything.

Danzo turned to the Hoakge, looking far angrier than he did when he had come into the room. "Hiruzen, if Namikaze-san can't keep track of his own student, he shouldn't be in charge of an entire battalion."

"Minato's talent is not the topic of our discussion. It is in everyone's best interest that Kakashi Hatake is found within the next 24 hours, otherwise *I will uproot* everything until I find him." The Hokage flared

his chakra and a second later an ANBU member dropped down from the ceiling. Pulling out a scroll from his desk drawer, he handed it over to the ANBU. The scroll was black, which was a color reserved for bodies. The implication of what The Hokage was promising was clear.

Neither Minato or Danzo said anything in response, and the tension in the room was growing. The three of them watching each other. No one moving. A pungent stillness suffocating the room.

Finally, Danzo shifted his weight off his cane and stood taller, taking a few steps towards The Hokage. The ANBU that was still beside the desk tensed, preparing for anything.

“I assure you I will use all of my resources to find the young Hatake, Hiruzen.” Danzo gave a short and small bow. Before he was turning to leave without being dismissed.

The Hokage and Minato Namikaze watched the man go. The Hokage spoke up before Danzo could fully make it out the door. “Danzo, for your sake I hope you had nothing to do with this. You're dismissed.”

Minato would have missed the falter in Danzo’s step if he hadn’t been watching the man like a hawk since he entered the room.

Minato turned back to The Hokage after the door shut behind Danzo. “We will find Kakashi, but you are still needed on your mission to escort Kushina to the borders. Konoha’s borders need her barrier seals.”

Minato felt his stomach drop. “But Hokage-sama!”

“Minato, I think that’s been enough disrespect for tonight. I understand the position I am putting you in, but I have made my decision. You’re dismissed.”

“But-”

“You’re *dismissed.”* The glare The Hokage leveled at him was enough to remind Minato he’d already pushed his luck. The ninja left The Hokage’s office, blood boiling and heart aching. He had to do something to find Kakashi. For the first time in his life Minato found himself questioning what the right thing to do really was.

~

He was still trekking through the forest when Obito felt it. Something was off. He couldn't tell what it was beyond that he was uneasy. He stopped and looked around, trying to see if he could spot anything in the trees or off in the distance.

He caught a glimpse of something off to his left and Obito froze. He wasn't sure if he should ignore it, go check, or turn and run. He hesitated. He was scared but that didn't matter, he should investigate. As he approached he didn't see anything, but something still felt off. Something was niggling at the back of his mind and Obito could feel himself becoming frustrated.

It was like when a word was on the tip of your tongue but you couldn't remember it. Obito stared harder at his surroundings and the feeling got worse. As if the answer was right there in front of him. It made his brain hurt. Pressure built up behind his eyes and Obito chastised himself for feeling like he wanted to cry. He just pushed even harder and this time something snapped.

His eyes finally landed on Kakashi Hatake, the most annoying boy in the world, drawing something in the dirt. Obito was certain he must have eternal bad luck, yes, that was it. Still he called out to him to get his attention. "OI! TEME!" Kakashi didn't look his way or even flinch at the sudden shout. "KAKASHI-TEME!" He called again. Still no response.

Then Obito noticed there was some sort of box around him. It looked kind of like Chakra. He made his way around the outside of the box, careful not to touch it. He would not have his class laughing at him because he accidentally blew his hand off. It was at that point he noticed there was a little less chakra in a small space on the left.

It was also then Obito realized he probably shouldn't be able to see the Chakra. It was also then that Obito realized he had accidentally *forced* his Sharingan to activate. An uncontainable excitement bubbled up in him. Oto-san was gonna be so proud!

It was also then that a pale and exhausted looking Kakashi poured all of his Chakra into the dirt below him and it blew up in his face. Obito watched in horror as Kakashi was thrown backwards directly into the Chakra wall, shattering it. Obito rushed forward because Kakashi had hit a tree and he could see blood spilling from the wound.

It freaked the small boy out but he racked his brain for anything he could remember about wounds, let alone Iro-ninjutsu. Was he supposed to apply pressure to a head wound? He couldn't remember. He couldn't remember anything about head wounds except that he was supposed to keep the wounded ninja awake.

"K-kakashi," Obito said. He lifted Kakashi's head into his lap, and was trying to use his blanket to stop the bleeding. Maybe he could apply a light pressure to the wound? Obito swore that next time, he'd know what to do. There would be no injury that the great Obito Uchiha could not heal.

Kakakshi groaned. It took a moment but his eyes opened slowly, and it took another few moments for him to register Obito's face. It looked to Obito that Kakashi wanted to cry, but he didn't say anything. It probably wasn't a good time.

"Hey Teme, what're you doing out here?" Obito asked, face furrowing. He hadn't really stopped to consider why Kakashi was in a Chakara box. And why hadn't he been able to see anything until his Sharingan had activated. It was like something hadn't let him see Kakashi.

Kakashi didn't respond, but his fingers slightly twitched and he was blinking weirdly. Obito stared longer for a few moments before his sharingan picked up that Kakashi was blinking in morse code. He squinted, trying to understand what Kakashi was saying.

'Can't move. Froggy went bad? Get help.'

"Froggy?" Obito asked. Kakashi glared at him and started again.

'Funny jutsu'

"What funny jutsu?" Obito decided Kakashi looked like he wanted to murder him. "It doesn't matter. I can't leave you here by yourself, your head is bleeding."

Kakashi started blinking again. *'Steady pressure. Flare Chakra.'*

"Uhhhhh…. How do you do that?" If it was possible, Kakashi glared harder. After a second he closed his eyes and Obito freaked out. "KAKASHI! YOU CAN'T FALL ASLEEP!"

Kakashi's eyes shot back open again and he glared at Obito. *'Yell with your chakra idiot'* If Kakashi hadn't been hurt Obito would have tried to hit him. Only Kakashi would waste time to insult him. Still Obito

listened and tried to figure out the best way to flare his chakra.

Yell with his chakra? He could do that. Maybe if he just pushed it all out? He faintly remembered something from a class lecture about how he specifically wasn't supposed to do that. But he was Obito Uchiha and he really didn't have any better ideas. So he gathered what he had and pushed.

In one instant it felt like Obito had just run a marathon, and there was an intense burning feeling behind his eyes. His sharingan. He probably should've turned it off, he'd been taught the basic principle early on. He was supposed to cut off chakra flow to his eyes. He was in the middle of trying to figure out how to do just that when he heard it.

There was a rustle in the leaves and a split second later Fugaku-sama, Hiro-san, and two members of ANBU had appeared in front of the two of them. Then the pain behind Obito's eyes became unbearable and the world before him faded away.

~

It was 4 am and they still hadn't found him. Minato had returned home long enough to share a quiet word with Jiraiya and explain to Otsuka he was going to keep searching right up until he had to leave for a mission. Otsuka was sitting on the couch staring at the wall shaking. Her panic attack had come late, once she had nothing to do but sit around. She'd tried to insist they let her go out and search with them but she'd made it halfway to the door before her legs collapsed under her.

It had been bad enough she'd thrown up in the sink and almost black out twice. Jiraiya hadn't been much help beyond watching her from a distance. Everytime Otsuka thought she had calmed herself down she was punched in the face by another intrusive thought and her panic attack was in full swing again.

Jiraiya was waiting by the door, his face was grim and Otsuka couldn't stand to look at it any more. Any time she looked at him it reminded her the Kakashi might never be found. Otsuka squeezed her hands a little harder. She refused to believe that.

She'd pulled every single string she could possibly pull until half the

entire village was out looking for Kakashi. Shikaku had every Nara out on the streets searching. Otsuka had spread word through her neighbors, hysterical and bawling, begging everyone to look for the young boy. It had only partially been an act, and it was humiliating. But Otsuka needed to get the sympathies of the same civilians who glared at Kakashi and she would do anything for the boy she was just now realizing she considered to be her son.

Jirayia pushed off the door frame, watching something happen outside of the apartment. Otsuka shot up and was at the door frame when Minato appeared in front of her. “They found him.” Otsuka let out a half sob. Her boyfriend’s face was worried and grim, and Kakashi wasn’t in his arms.

“He’s in the hospital being treated by Tsunade. That’s all I know, we should head there now.” Minato was breathless, and there were dark circles under his eyes. Otsuka wondered for a moment if he was still pretending to sleep and she hadn’t noticed.

Minto scooped his girlfriend into his arms, and hirashined to the hospital. Otsuka tried desperately not to think of what harm might have come to her little boy while he had been gone. She clung tighter to Minato. They rushed down the hall, but were stopped by Fugaku before he could make it into the room.

“He has some serious nerve damage and had a head wound when we found him. He was also with Obito Uchiha.” Fugaku nodded to the room next to him. “He alerted us with a chakra flare but between that and his sharingan he has a serious case of chakra exhaustion. We don’t know anything more yet. Shikaku and a team of ANBU are investigating the area.”

Minato set Otsuka down in a chair and kept a hand on her shoulder to make sure she stayed seated. “Is he going to be okay?” Otsuka asked.

“He’s young, he should be able to handle it.” Fugaku frowned, staring at the door for a few seconds.

Otsuka didn’t say anything about the non-answer and stared at the door in front of her. He had to be okay. She needed him to be okay. She needed him to be okay because if he wasn’t Otsuka thought she might break.

When Minato lifted her into his lap and curled around Otsuka, she didn’t protest. When Otsuka shifted slightly and began to braid his hair, he didn’t protest. So Minato stared at the door and Otsuka’s

hands shook.

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for how long this took guys. College is a lot and to be honest I'm still not satisfied with how this chapter turned out but I can't stay stuck on it for too long. Also we hit 50,000 words! I'm very excited! I hope you enjoy and remember feed back or criticism is always welcome!

It was six hours later when the door opened. Tsunade emerged angry, glaring at Minato. “What have you been teaching that boy? He was attempting fuinjutsu that was fraying his nerves.”

“Fuinjutsu? I’ve made it clear to him I didn’t want him experimenting at this stage.” Minato shifted Otsuka off his lap and into the chair, standing up and moving towards Tsunade. “How is he? Is he going to be okay?”

Tsunade’s glare softened to a frown. “He has severe chakra exhaustion, he’ll need quite a while to recover from some ligaments he tore, and he has a minor concussion. Depending on how he heals he might lose a little feeling in his fingers. He needs to refrain from using any chakra for a while, and I want to personally oversee his retraining when he does start to manipulate chakra again. That boy did a number on his nerves.”

Otsuka moved to stand but found Shikaku’s hand on her shoulder, keeping her from standing. “Can we see him?” Tsunade’s gaze moved from Minato to Otsuka; she’d only met the woman once before.

“As long as you all let him sleep, I’m going to come in and check on him every hour for a while, and we will see where to go from there. In the meantime, I’m going to give Obito a once over to make sure nothing goes wrong.” Tsunade shared a look with Shikaku and Minato before she made her way into Obito’s hospital room.

Minato turned back to his girlfriend and gave her a tired smile. “I should go find Fugaku and the Hokage and see what they know about what happened. I-” He looked to Kakashi’s room and then back to Otsuka. Otsuka could practically see his mind and heart warring against each other. She was about to tell him she thought he should stay when Shikaku spoke up first.

“I’ll go take care of everything Minato, stay here and wait for him to wake up. Besides you have to leave tomorrow.” Shikaku stood, patting his cousin on the head and nodding to Minato. As Shikaku made his way down the hallway, Minato helped Otsuka to her feet.

Otsuka’s legs ached from the eventful night and the following hours of waiting. She leaned heavily on her boyfriend as he led her into Kakashi’s room. When her eyes fell on her child she sobbed.

Kakashi lay there; covered in bandages and tubes, his sleeping face grimacing, but there. Alive. That was enough for the result of hours of anxiety and terror to come crashing down on her shoulders. She gripped Minato tighter as tears spilled down her cheeks.

Kakashi was alive. But he was also dwarfed by medical equipment and from the looks of his face he wasn’t having a good dream. He looked so fragile. Her heart was wrenching itself out of her chest. “Oh my god…..” Otsuka leaned heavily into Minato, eyes wide. “Minato- He-I-” She couldn’t put what she was thinking into words, but she didn’t need to. Minato understood.

“I know.” Minato grabbed a chair with one hand, moving it so Otsuka could sit by Kakashi’s bed, and maneuvered her into the chair. They watched him for a while in silence, neither daring to look away.

~

“You’re right Jiraiya, it is an Uzumaki seal, but it’s been messed with. It shouldn’t have kept Kakashi in a confined area, it should have simply kept everyone from noticing him and the area around him.” Kushina was glaring at the seal that sat on the table in The Hokage's office.

“Inoichi and I had already searched those woods,” Shikaku was frowning, “So the seal was working, but it doesn’t explain how Obito Uchiha was able to break through that part of the seal.”

“If the seal had been weakened enough it’s possible a fully formed sharingan would have been able to break through, but not Obito.” Fugaku said, he moved from his spot behind the table towards The Hokage’s desk. “Hokage-sama, I believe someone wanted an Uchiha to find Kakashi, the fact that it was a young child makes our clan even

more suspicious. I believe-”

“I have noticed the blame that has been shifted onto the Uchiha clan Fugaku. For now I need you to keep your clan in line. We are at war and there is no time for the villagers to become scared of the police force. I’ll leave it in your hands to find the right solution.”

Fugaku didn’t respond but Hiruzen could tell he wanted to argue further, but he didn’t have the ninja to spare to look into this matter. For now he’d have to trust fugaku’s judgement and hope that it would sort itself out. If it was still a problem when the war was over he’d be able to spare the time to give it his proper attention.

He turned to the uzumaki in the room. “Kushina, I’m afraid I still need you and Minato to leave tomorrow, it’s imperative you complete your mission. Go rest up and remind Minato.” Kushina’s face betrayed her anger at the decision but she knew she was in no position to argue. Hiruzen kept himself from sighing as she stormed from the office.

He wished he could give Minato the time but the recent casualties would not allow one of Konoha’s strongest ninja to stay out of the war this long.

Kushina had barely made it out the door before Jiraiya was protesting. “Sensei you’re really going to-” Jiraiya was cut off by the look the Hokage gave him.

“We do not have enough ninja for Minato to go without a mission for another month. It is unfortunate but necessary. We need the two of them to help push back Iwa’s forces from behind.” Hiruzen knew Jiraiya wouldn’t argue further while there were others in the room, and he took full advantage of it. “Shikaku this is the third time your cousin has been caught in the middle of an inner village incident.”

The man before him stiffened, something Hiruzen had only noticed because he’d been looking for it. So Shikaku had been wondering the same thing. What was it about this woman that caused so many of his ninja to drop everything for her.

“She’s become quite close with many important figures in Konoha, if someone wanted to get at both Konoha’s beginning mental health program and it’s ninja they would target her.” Shikaku didn’t betray anything else, and Hiruzen was sure he was missing something else. He held back yet another sigh. He supposed if it was detrimental to Konha’s survival Shikaku wouldn’t hide it.

“Well Jiraiya will keep an eye on her and Kakashi until Minato returns. Fugaku I believe for now we should increase the patrols on Konoha’s streets at night, inform me if you are in need of any help. Dismissed.” The two left while his student stayed behind. The look on his face told him he was in for a long argument with Jiraiya.

~

“Do we know anything about what happened?” Otsuka was holding Kakashi’s, her eyes never once leaving his face. This was the fifth time Tsundade had come to check up on Kakashi. It was midday now.

“Based on the extent of his nerve damage and how Obito found him, we believe he was trapped in a seal and he had messed up quite a few seal attempts to escape before we found him.” Tsunade finished up changing his bandages and turned to the boy’s almost parents. “I’ve already informed The Hokage that Kakashi is going to need to be taken off the active roster duty for a minimum of three months. I want to have daily check ups for the first month, and I’m not sure when I’ll be able to release him from the hospital. It all depends on how his healing is.”

“Do you know when he’ll wake up?” Minato moved from behind Otsuka’s chair to the foot of the hospital bed.

“Within 24 hours. The last of the sedatives should be filtering out of his system. Come get me when he finally wakes up. I’m also sure there will be plenty of questions for him, but try to keep the people who come in to friendly faces. I want him to rest before you all go hounding him for answers.”

“I will have to return to work soon. Would it be alright if I worked in this room Tsunade-sama?” Otsuka shifted so she was no longer leaning forward in the chair.

“Tsunade is just fine, and of course. Interaction with his family and friends will be good for him anyhow.”

“Ah Tsuande,” Minato spoke up again. “Would you mind giving Otsuka a check up, her legs collapsed out from under her twice in the last day. I’m worried with the amount of stress she went through she aggravated her wounds enough to...” The man trailed off as he turned

his stare on Otsuka and Kakashi. He wasn't looking forward to leaving them both here.

Tsunade's eyes snapped to the young woman in the chair and gave her a light glare. "You should have informed me sooner. Come sit over here." The medic nin helped Otsuka move to the stool in the corner before asking her permission to check over her hips. After a diagnostic ninjutsu Tusnade was sighing.

"You've certainly done a number on this ligament here. You need to keep off your feet for the next week as much as possible. It might be good to put you back in a wheelchair. Any more stress and that limp might become permanent." Otsuka winced at the information. She'd been too frantic to think about anything but finding Kakashi. "And you better pay a visit to Dr.Yui."

"Yes ma'am." Tsunade nodded and made her way out of the room.

Minato walked over and lifted her into his arms. Otsuka didn't protest, simply letting him plop her into the chair again. "Can't let you out of my sight can I?"

Otsuka nodded and pushed herself forward enough to grab Kakashi's hand. "I'll do my best to make sure I don't overstress any muscles again." Her voice was almost defensive. Minato couldn't quite tell.

"I wasn't saying you were doing it purposefully."

"I didn't think you were."

"Oh."

The room fell into an uncomfortable silence. Finally Minato moved to sit in front of Otsuka's chair, leaning his head back into her lap. He let out a shaky sigh and stared up at her. "What're you thinking about?"

She stayed silent and he watched her stare at Kakashi. Her hair had fallen out of her ponytail and there were dark bags under her eyes. She hadn't slept well after he had told her he had a mission to run, and with the past day and a half to top everything off, she looked exhausted. Kakashi's disappearance had to have reminded her of how recently she had lost her mother.

"I couldn't protect him." She finally answered, still staring at Kakashi. Her voice was soft, she sounded fragile. "I'm never going to be able to protect him from the people who are after him, even if I started now.

I'm no ninja."

Minato reached up to cup her face and gently turned it to look at him. She met his eyes and gave him a watery smile. Otsuka had always given him the comfort and stability he needed. She was the one thing he could always count on, someone who would always believe in him and would always love him no matter what happened.

"Maybe not. But you've kept him from the hands of Danzo, and last night you were more than willing to use whatever means necessary to find him. Let me worry about protecting him from physical harm. I will not fail either of you again. But you can protect him from himself, from the harsh words of others around him. He's got the two of us, not just one."

"We haven't been doing a very good job."

Minato hides his wince behind a smile. "Ah well, we're new to this whole parenthood thing."

Otsuka tenses. "Parenthood? Do you think he thinks of us as parents?" There's a mix of doubt and hope in her words. At her words both parents look to Kakashi. He still hasn't stirred.

"I hope so."

The knock at the door draws them both away from their conversation and Minato lets go of Otsuka's face while he lifts his head out of her lap. "Come in."

The door opens to reveal Kushina before she steps in and smiles. The smile dims when her gaze falls on Kakashi. "So what's the verdict?"

"He'll be alright, it's just going to take a while." Minato responded, starting to push himself up from the floor.

"That's good. I hate to be the bearer of bad news but the Hokage insists we leave tomorrow morning for our mission. I don't mind packing for you but-"

Minato waved her off. "I can pack, besides I need to drop by the apartment to grab Otsuka and Kakashi some clothes and food and Otsuka's wheelchair. Anything else you need Otsuka?"

"Maybe a pillow?" Otsuka hesitated. "I'm sure Kin or Yoshino will stop by soon, everything else can wait until then. Make sure you eat

something too.” She gave him a small smile, one that seemed more assured than it had a few minutes ago. He nodded and leaned in for a kiss before he shared a look with Kushina and flashed from the room.

~

“You let them find him?” Danzo stormed into the bunker, eyes blazing.

“Danzo did you really think we could keep the boy locked up in Konoha?”

Danzo didn’t respond.

“Besides now she’s vulnerable. We can slip in our plant and she won’t notice before it’s too late. By then if anyone does find any evidence the blame will fall solely on her and you’ll have your hands on Kakashi.”

“That wasn’t our deal Orochimaru.”

The snake man scoffed. “You’ve yet to keep your end of our little bargain. You may complain after you’ve done so.” Orochimaru glanced at his clipboard and then at the experiment in front of him. “Speaking of, when are you going to get me those Hashirama cells Danzo?”

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kakashi woke to the sound of Otsuka, Mikoto, Kushina, and Minato playing Hanafuda. Minato's quiet laugh gently brought him out of his sleep, and after a moment he opened his eyes, daring to hope that he had actually escaped.

"Kakashi?" A moment later his sensei was in his sight and smiling at him. He started to try to sit up but there was a gentle hand on his shoulder keeping him down. Otsuka appeared in his view too.

"Hi Kakashi, I'm so glad you're awake." He faintly heard Mikoto call out that she was going to fetch Tsunade. Otsuka leaned down and kissed his forehead. "You're safe now." She gave him a light hug and whispered into his ear. "A bunch of people are about to come in and ask questions. Just remember that if it's too much we're here to intervene." She pulled away and gave him the biggest smile she could even though there were tears in her eyes.

He let it convince him that everything was going to be okay. He ignored the bags under both of his guardians eyes, the concern and exhaustion that showed on their faces. Everything was going to be okay, it had to be.

Minato pushed two of the longer braids in his blonde hair behind his ear as he leaned over the end of the bed. "You did a good job Kakashi." The young boy attempted to sit up again but this time Otsuka helped him slowly rise. She held him steady with one arm while she moved some pillows around behind him.

"Comfy?"

Kakashi nodded but looked at his hands. He was ashamed, he had gotten caught in the middle of the village. What kind of ninja was he that he couldn't escape from a prison that Obito Uchiha could find. What kind of ninja was he that-

"Kakashi, it wasn't your fault." The words pull him from his thoughts and he stares at Minato with disbelief. "It wasn't. You did your best and that was enough. And after we clear a few things up you can leave all the worrying to us."

“But I couldn’t escape.”

“Actually you did escape gaki. The seal wasn’t great but you were the one who got yourself out of that mess. If it wasn’t for you we never would have found you.” Kakashi’s head snapped towards the door. Immediately after, his hands shot to his head and Minato was by his side.

“Close your eyes and lay back.” Minato gently led his head onto the pillow. He then glared at his teacher. “If you’re only going to make his condition worse I will kick you out sensei.”

“Now, now, don’t get your panties in a twist.” Jiraiya rolled his eyes as he entered the room. “Otsuka would you mind giving us a moment alone?” He gave the woman a smile.

“Actually yes I would mind. I’m not leaving Kakashi alone with all of you. He’s a young child who just experienced a very traumatic event you are going to make him relive. I don’t believe for a second any of you are going to be as kind as you want me to believe, no offense Minato.” Her gaze didn’t waver from Jiraiya’s but in the corner of her eye she could see Minato beaming at her.

Jiraiya raised an eyebrow but didn’t object. In a few minutes Kakashi’s hospital room was crowded with Konoha’s finest. The questioning process was long and detailed, and despite Otsuka’s worries Kakashi managed to get through his story without any major breakdowns. Kakashi explained that he had taken the back routes to escape people towards Otsuka’s work. He’d quickly realized he was in some sort of loop and after a while he’d decided his best bet was to experiment with seals.

After two hours Tsunade had finally ushered them all out of the room to allow Kakashi a break.

Minato left with them, promising to be back soon, and Otsuka settled into the Hospital bed with Kakashi at his request. She watched over him when he fell back asleep, exhausted from the questioning. She’d done her best to interrupt when she’d noticed he was getting lost in the memory.

It was honestly frightening hearing him recall the full story. Was it so easy for someone to be abducted from the streets of Konoha? She shivered. As time went on she felt as if the veil over her eyes had begun to fall. Had Konoha always had these horrors hidden deep in the shadows?

~

Kushina almost hadn't stopped by at all. In fact, the only reason she'd even actually went up the steps was to avoid having to go back to Mikoto's home. Being reminded the one she loved was married to someone else every second she was with her had started to become suffocating. Besides she was sure Fugaku was complaining to Mikoto about how The Hokage just ignored Uchiha.

Of course when she just stormed in hoping to scare Minato, she hadn't expected to find him staring a hole into the floor. In fact she was surprised he was even still here. His worry wart tendencies were probably screaming he needed to get back to his girlfriend and pseudo child. She closed the door behind her and he didn't move, staring with a haunted look across his face.

"Minato?"

His head snapped up. "Huh? Oh Kushina, sorry I was-" Kushina frowned at him and he cut himself off. Her face told him any lie he tried would fail. "Nevermind, why are you here?"

"Escaping Fugaku, Minato have you talked to anyone?" Genuine concern was written across her face. She knew the signs of a ninja who was stuck in their memories and Minato's slow reaction-time and that look gave everything away.

Minato sighed and leaned back into the couch, hand running through his hair. "No, I will, eventually. I know Otsuka's waiting for me to ask before she gives me her list but-"

"Minato." He looked back at Kushina to see her giving him a hard stare. "You must know Hiruzen is considering you for the Yondaime position. Everyone knows. You don't have the luxury to take your time with this, Konoha needs you at your best. Ask for the list." She reaches out her hand to help him up.

He takes it and sighs. "This is going to suck."

Kushina smirks at him before turning to go. "You bet your pretty ass it will. Speaking of things you've been putting off, pick out a fucking ring already will you?"

“Kushina let’s address one problem at a time.” Kushina gave him an exasperated look but didn’t push any further. “I’m heading back to the hospital, I’ll meet you at sunrise at the gates? Don’t forget anything this time!”

Minato moved to the side to avoid the three kunai that were thrown at his face right before the door closed, laughing. He glanced back to gather them and winced. “I should have caught that one, Otsuka’s gonna kill me for putting another hole the furniture.”

The coming weeks away from his family were going to be long, but he’d have to rely on his friends and sensei to keep Kakashi and Otsuka protected. Besides, Otsuka would be focusing on Kakashi and that would keep the two for the most part inside the hospital, surrounded by ninja, while he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry the chapter is so short and it took so long to update, college is really killing me. I just wanted to take a moment to thank all of you, over 4000 hits, almost 150 kudos and 40 comments. Thats so crazy, more people have viewed this story than went to my high school. I'm shocked and that means so much to me. As a heads up the next chapter has a bit of a time skip, I'm trying to get better at leading into time skips but I'm still struggling.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

> Whew 2020 was a year I am excited to leave behind. I'm going to try my best to get back on to posting once a month. As a little FYI I have now gone through and made quite a few edits to all of the chapters and added trigger warnings to a few of the chapters that mention Sakumo's death

Otsuka was going a little bit crazy. Kakashi was healing well, but he was restless. His sealing work had been suspended until further notice and while Gai and Obito would frequent his hospital room often it wasn't enough. Kakashi slept for the first week, and the week after he was satisfied with a few hours of visitors and maybe an hour or two of reading. However when they hit week three Kakashi was done. Done with reading, done with sleeping, done with sitting, done with his restricted foods and constant check ups.

Otsuka was swamped with work, and she hadn't had much time to look for a secretary. She was single-handedly taking care of her pseudo-son's mental and physical recovery, helping her patients, overseeing the start of her new branch, continuing her studying, and helping Mikoto with the Uchiha plan. And if that wasn't enough Minato was late, weeks late.

At first she wasn't worried, two days was nothing compared to how late Minato was last time. Plus she'd heard from Shikaku that it was very possible the drop off point had changed as the frontlines moved. Then two weeks had passed and Kakashi and Otsuka were both ready to pull their hair out. Minato was by no means an unknown target. If he was dead or captured they would know by now. By that standard no news was good news.

It helped that the day after Minato's arrival Jiraiya had popped out of nowhere to assure her he was going to go find his student and bring him home. It scared her too, but Otsuka chose to believe that everything would be fine. In reality if she hadn't had so many other things to worry about she might have gone to the Hokage about it. She had to believe in Minato's ability to take care of himself. She couldn't afford to be so focused on worrying about Minato that she'd leave Kakashi without support.

Kakashi was taking Minato's absence well. Maybe it was because he

was so focused on being done with the hospital he didn't have time to worry or *think* about anything else. It was a coping mechanism, and it was one Otsuka had been observing like a hawk. She'd been hearing endless hours of Kakashi's non-stop sighing before she finally caved and gave him the secretary resumes to look through.

He'd taken it very seriously, and spent a full four days checking over every applicant. She'd neglected to tell him this was the list Kin had given her, which meant all seven options were trustworthy.

"So Takeshi is a no? I actually thought his application was the most promising." Otsuka frowned as she tried to figure out what Kakashi had seen she had missed. Examining the picture of the light-harried man before her she pulled his history out to inspect it again.

"He just-" Kakashi paused. Otsuka stopped her investigation to look up at him. "Well, he just looks suspicious."

"He looks suspicious?" She felt like she was missing something. "What do you mean?" Kakashi shrugged and looked away from her. Looking back down at the man's picture it hit her. Takeshi was probably about the same height as Minato, and his face looked reminiscent of her boyfriends. She frowned. There was a long pause as she pondered what to say.

"Kakashi, I want you to know that Minato and I will always love you no matter what. It doesn't matter what my relationship with Minato is like, if we're dating or not, you will always come first for both of us." Kakashi's head snapped towards his pseudo mother. She could read the surprise on his face.

"I just don't want-" He stopped again. Glancing up at Otsuka he took a shaky breath. He'd seen her do it a million times before she did something she was scared of. It gave him the confidence he needed. He wanted more than anything to impress Otsuka, to be like her. "I don't want us to stop being a family."

Otsuka set the file on the foot of Kakashi's bed as she reached out to offer a hug. As the young boy settled into her hug she kissed the top of his head. "Can I let you in on a secret?"

"What secret?"

"When we were waiting for you to wake up I admitted something to Minato-" Otsuka took a deep breath, one that matched Kakashi's. She felt his hold on her tighten. "I told him that I think of you as my son.

And, of course I don't want to replace your mother. But Kakashi, I will always love you, no matter what happens."

Kakashi didn't move. He stayed clinging to her so long Otsuka wasn't sure what he was thinking, and as time passed the anxiety in her stomach rose. She did her best to breathe through it, because right now Kakashi needed her full attention.

"Kaa-san?" It was at that moment Otsuka's heart broke with love.

"Yes Kakashi?"

"Thank you"

The two sat together for a while before Obito had barged in with a book to share with Kakashi. Obito's father, Kagami, followed after the boy apologising for his son's rudeness. Otsuka waved it off as she slid off Kakashi's bed. A second later Kagami was by her side to help her to her chair on the other side of the room.

While Kakashi and Obito yelled at each other over the book Otsuka asked about Obito's checkup. Usually Kagami only accompanied the boy to the hospital when Obito had an appointment with Tsunade. The sannin was worried about Obito's development with the chakra drain he'd experienced now that he had his sharingan at 6.

"He'll be alright. She suggested that he get a tutor in addition to his academy schooling."

"Do you have anyone in mind yet?"

Kagami looked over at his son and a soft smile appeared on his face. "Yeah, I need to discuss it with Fugaku-sama first. How's your secretary search going?"

Otsuka sighed. "The interviews are scheduled throughout the next couple of days. Hopefully by the end of the week I'll be able to hire someone."

"And any news on Minato-san?" He asked quietly.

"No. No, not yet." Otsuka bit her lip as her eyes fell to the floor. She tried not to think about how they'd missed his birthday. She tried not to think aboutShe wouldn't cry. It would be fine, she didn't have the time to be worrying.

“I’m sure Minato-san is alright.” There was a long pause as Kagami watched the children and Otsuka did her best to regain her composure. “I must thank you, before Kakashi, Obito never had any friends.”

Otsuka shook her head. “The thanks should go to Kakashi, he’s the one who’s put the work into their friendship.”

“Then you must thank him for me. Unfortunately I will have to take my leave now, would you mind if I leave Obito here?”

“Not at all, anytime he comes Kakashi perks up. Besides I have my rehab in about 30 minutes and I’d rather not leave Kakashi alone.” Kagami bid his son goodbye and half an hour later Otsuka did the same, telling the two to behave while she was gone.

Her session went well enough, she’d been allowed no crutches for short stretches, and she could use one for longer distances. She hadn’t been moving enough lately for her to really be stressing her body.

Two hours later she was back in Kakashi’s room with food to feed the three of them. After that Obito said goodbye with a promise to go straight home. Otsuka went back to work while Kakashi started reading the book Obito had brought him. Slowly the sun began to set and a nurse came in to drop off dinner, and after making sure Kakashi ate Otsuka was right back to work. She stayed that way for a few hours more until there was a knock on the door.

“Otsuka?”

The woman’s head snapped up from her work and she smiled at Shikaku as he entered. Kakashi didn’t lift his eyes from the book he was reading. “Perfect timing, I actually have an important question for you.”

Shikaku raised an eyebrow, closing the door soundlessly behind him.

“If you were going to move a hyuuga out of the hyuuga compound how exactly would you go about it?”

Shikaku froze. “Otsuka please tell me you aren’t about to try to move a branch member out of the hyuuga clan.”

Otsuka glanced over and Kakashi was looking at his mother, eyes wide. She sighed, she probably shouldn’t have this conversation where Kakashi could hear. She stood, grabbing one crutch that was leaning

against the large chair they had moved into the hospital room. “Kakashi please stay in the room.” As she moved towards the door Shikaku reached out and offered her a hand to help her out of the hospital room.

The two made their way into another empty hospital room, and Shikaku watched Otsuka’s movements like a hawk. He suspected the stress she’d been under wasn’t helping her heal. The moment the door was closed Otuska started up her argument. “I need to move one of my patients, they’re condition is getting worse staying in the compound. Is there no way to give them the help they need to leave?”

Shikaku shook his head. “The Hyuuga brand their branch members Otsuka, your patient could leave but they would simply burn out their eyes. They refuse to let the byakugan leave their clan. Besides there is nothing we can do about it. The clans are allowed to handle their own inner clan issues however they see fit.”

“They brand them?!” Otsuka felt her blood boil. “Shikaku they BRAND THEM?!”

Shikaku looked at the woman in front of him in shock. He’d never heard her raise her voice in anger. “Otsu-”

“No Shikaku. I will not allow my patients to be *branded.* Is that why Hizashi always wears-” She cut herself off. She couldn’t comprehend the idea that this had been going on for years and no one had stopped it. Otuska felt terrified to ask what else the brand did. Because if they had the gall to burn out the eyes on any member who defied them what else were they capable of doing? Still she had to know. “What else does it do Shikaku?”

The man frowned but answered anyway. “I don’t know much else. From what I’ve gathered they have the ability to use the brand for punishment if a branch member doesn’t follow their rules.” He paused. “We can’t do anything about it. Otsuka. We aren’t a part of their clan.” Shikaku had the sudden horrible feeling that telling Otsuka about the brand was probably the worst move he could’ve made.

Otsuka shook her head. How could anyone let this happen? Clans had the right to handle certain inner clan relations but to brand your own members and threaten them with it when they left? And everyone was always angry with the Uchiha. She needed to talk to Hizashi, she couldn’t let this continue.

“You aren’t gonna let this go are you?” Otsuka looked up to find her cousin with a resigned look on his face as he stared at nothing in particular. He gave her a long suffering sigh before looking back at her. “I guess I asked for this telling you about the brand. Well, what’s the plan?”

A younger Otsuka would've turned to him and called him the genius. A younger Otsuka would’ve asked what she could do to help. “I need you to get Hizashi to pay Kakashi and I a visit, and I need you to ask Fume to host a dinner for a few of the clan heads. I’ll let you handle keeping people’s noses out of our attempts. Also I need to find a secretary as fast as possible.”

“How’re you going to handle removing the brand Otsuka?” Shikaku was smiling at her. As much of a headache as this was going to become, he was going to enjoy every minute of his almost sister ripping apart the Hyuuga.

“Well, in theory Minato should be home any day now. I guess I should just resign myself to him always being late home from missions. It’s becoming a habit.”

“What date should I set the dinner for?”

“Hmmm, when does the next cycle of clan heads go out? I know Hiyashi won’t be in the village for much longer.”

“The end of the month.”

“Well I guess the first of next month is perfect then.” Otsuka was tugging on a strand of her own hair as she mulled over how on earth she was going to convince the Hyuuga to stop branding branch members. Hizashi was married, and at this point her best bet was to play with the future father. “One last thing, do you think you can look into what exactly the brand does. It would be good to know before I approach Hizashi about it, and I’m not going to put my patient in danger by asking them questions about it.”

“I will.” Shikaku’s mind was already racing to form a plan to fill in the gaps for anything Otsuka wouldn’t know to plan around and any other precautionary sets he could take as clan head. “Anything else?”

Otsuka deflated, anxiety creeping up on her. There was no way she had thought of everything. What was she missing? “Umm” She racked her brain for anything else she could do to prepare but it really all came down to Hizashi. “Well, it’s off topic but would you mind sitting

in on my interviews for a secretary? I know its dumb, I already had Kin, Minato, and Kakashi narrow down the options but, well it would make me feel better."

Shikaku nodded as he waved goodbye to his free time. Otuska was quickly eating up his cloud gazing time. "When are they?"

"Oh I'll give you the list when we get back to room." Pushing herself out of the chair she'd temporarily seated herself in, she moved to hug her cousin. "Thank you Shikaku."

"Anytime." As Shikaku wrapped his arms around her, he felt her shoulders begin to shake and a few seconds later her tears followed.

~

Jiraiya was not at all surprised to find out his precious student had ended up stuck on the front lines. Iwa had sent more troops than Konoha had expected and the first few outposts had been overrun. With many of Konoha's heavy hitters back at home, Minato had realized leaving Kushina to push back the entire army wouldn't be enough. So he left her the eastern war front as he worked on the southern.

The Hokage had decided to send Jiraiya after two weeks with no communication from the frontlines. On his trip there he'd run into a group of konoha nin that had turned out to be spies and suddenly the lack of communication was making sense. Minato had probably ordered to cut off of all communication that he couldn't be certain was trustworthy.

After that he'd taken a small detour to get rid of their little spy problem. He'd tracked it down to a small group of three ninja selling the clothing and information they'd gotten off dead Konoha nin. An 'accidental' fire had solved the issue and Jiraiya was back on his original mission.

"Sensei, it's not that I'm not thankful you're here-"

"But you're worried about your girlfriend, yeah, yeah, I know. Don't worry Mother, last I checked she's surrounded by paranoid ninja in the hospital."

Minato gave his teacher a half-hearted glare before continuing his sentence. "But you could at least pay attention."

Jiraya rolled his eyes. “You need me to find their encampment while you get their main forces attention. I heard you the first time. Wouldn’t it be better to just let me seduce one of the Kunochi and-”

“Sensei!”

“Minato you’re no fun.”

~

The interviews had been going well. In fact Shikaku was surprised that all of the candidates so far had seemed amazing. He caught a few lies here and there but nothing that was concerning, it was clear they just wanted to impress Otsuka.

The next interviewee was a young kunoichi named Mebuki. She was only 16, but she had enough experience as a chunin who regularly manned the mission desk with coordination, she had an eidetic-like memory, and her heightened Chakra sensitivity would go a long way for being able to pick up on Otsuka’s emotions while she was inside the office. She was the one Shikaku was the most interested in.

She arrived ten minutes early, and patiently sat in the hall while she waited to be called in. Otsuka was only willing to wait til it was five minutes early and not the ten minutes late the clan head had suggested. He’d gotten a dirty look for that suggestion.

Shikaku swung the door open to find the teen watching an interaction happening down the hallway. She only turned her head to smile at Shikaku, acting as if she hadn’t just been caught snooping. Shikaku held back a smile. She was good. “Mebuki?”

“Yes?”

“Otsuka is ready for you.” He jerked his head back and went back into the room to leave her to close the door. Plopping himself down in the chair he’d been using he flipped to a random page in the book he’d been passively reading.

Mebuki moved into the room and closed the door behind her soundlessly. It was another point towards her in Shikaku’s book. “Welcome, it’s nice to meet you Mebuki-san.”

“You as well Nara-san.”

“Ah, just call me Otsuka, Nara-san makes me feel old.” Shikaku

snorted loud enough for everyone in the hall to hear and Otsuka sent him a glare. “Excuse him. Anyway let’s dive right in. So Mebuki, can you tell me a little about what you want out of this job?”

“I want something different from the chunin desk. It doesn’t pay enough, I need more than just the chunin pension to help out my family. I have five siblings and my mother is sick, this job is a huge pay raise. Besides, you’re about to start something important here, and I would love to be a part of it.”

It was like she was a girl after Otsuka's own heart, a sick mother, someone to take care of, wanting to make a difference. It was a little scary how similar the two seemed to be already. Shikaku was certain Otsuka was thinking the same thing.

“So no long term plans for the future?”

“Ah well,” At this Mebuki blushed, the first real reaction out of her Otsuka had gotten. “Maybe eventually I’d like to settle down with someone and have some children. But that’s far in the future.”

Otsuka reached down into her desk drawer to pull out a file. She began to read it as she continued to ask questions. “Now I’ve gone over all your recommendations, and frankly they’re glowing Mebuki-san.” Otsuka smiled up at her. “Still, could you tell me a bit about what you think are your strengths?”

The rest of the interview was more to lull Mebuki into a sense of ease. To make her feel like Shikaku and Otsuka trusted her. They’d gone over a plan before the interviews started. Otsuka would drop little tidbits about her family of things she liked to do outside of work. Shikaku would start a little banter every now and then. They wanted them to be relaxed by the end.

Finally Otsuka would write something on a piece of paper and ask Shikaku to deliver it to Kin. Shikaku would refuse for whatever lazy reason he could come up with. So Otsuka would stand to deliver it herself, but Shikaku would tell her to stay seated and not to aggravate her wound. Then he’d suggest the interviewee deliver it and give them some sort of sign like a wink or a nod to make it look like he was on their side. Like he was trying to get them access to the information in the note.

Otsuka would politely ask them to not look in the note before they were off to deliver it. What the interviewee didn’t know was that the paper had a seal on it that would activate if the paper was unfolded.

The paper would disintegrate and there would be no message to deliver Kin. Everyone so far had opened it and either delivered a blank paper they had found or been up front about their choice.

Mebuki took the note with a small bow before thanking Otsuka for the opportunity and two minutes later Kin was at the door. He was smiling and waving the piece of paper.

“She delivered the original paper.”

Otsuka actually whooped. A large smile spread across her face as she cheered for Mebuki.

“So can we just forgo the last interview if we know you’re gonna hire Mebuki?” Shikaku asks from the chair.

“No, it’s important we give everyone a fair chance before we decide.” Otsuka felt rather like throwing something at Shikaku’s head.

“But you’ve already decided.”

Kin laughed. “Who knows maybe the final one will be even better.”

Shikaku glared at Kin from his chair. “Please feel free to switch with me and sit here through these tedious interviews.”

“You agreed to do this.” Otsuka replies, replacing Mebuki’s file in the drawer.

“Agree makes it sound like I had an option. Ah where’s Minato when you need him. He would’ve loved to sit here and flirt with you while the poor interviewee had to listen to you two go on.” Shikaku watched Otsuka’s face carefully at the mention of her boyfriend. She just rolled her eyes as she pulled out the next interviewee’s file but her grip on the desk tightened. He shared a look with Kin.

At this point it was just a matter of time before Otsuka ran herself raggad trying to handle everything and Shikaku was going to do everything in his power to keep that from happening.

~

Minato was flashing back and forth across the battlefield at lightning speeds doing everything in his power to keep Iwa’s attention. If they caught on to the fact that Minato and his division were the distraction the entire plan would be destroyed. From the expressions of the ninja

he was fighting they were growing suspicious. Konoha's forces had focused less on killing everyone and more on keeping their attention.

Minato needed to do something and fast. He couldn't afford for the Iwa-nin to retreat until Jiraiya was back and had confirmed all of the bomb seals had been planted in the encampment. He needed something that could look like the large attack Konoha had been waiting for, but that could fail enough they wouldn't start an immediate retreat.

He contemplated summoning Gamakichi but it would be a large drain on his chakra, and Gamakichi would be a little too effective at his job. He had a few of Kushina's barrier seals on him but it wouldn't do the job either. His mind was drawn to the strange genjutsu-like trap Kakashi had been pulled into. If he could pull something off but on a larger scale he might be able to trick the Iwa-nin that they were winning. It would take him a few minutes to draw up the seal, and the chakra drain would be immense, but it would do the trick.

He pulled out of the fight back to their own encampment and set to work. By the time he was done the Iwa nin had already started to pullback. With no time to lose and no time to recheck his work he pushed his chakra into the seal and prayed.

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Otsuka was woken from her sleep by Kakashi's nightmares. She was on her feet a few seconds later, cautiously rousing him from his nightmare. He's accidentally lashed out at her a few times, and she knew he'd beat himself up if he ever hurt her.

Snapping out of his dream, Kakashi threw himself into Otsuka's arms. She didn't say anything as he clung to her, entire body shaking, just soothingly ran her hands through his hair and hummed a low tune. They'd spent every night like this for the past two weeks. His nightmares had become more frequent after the day Minato was supposed to arrive home came and went. Kakashi usually wouldn't fall back asleep, and so Otsuka endeavored to stay up with him. Sometimes she'd read to him, other times they would discuss beginner fuinjutsu theory or whatever Otsuka was currently stressing about.

Tonight, as Kakashi calmed himself through long slow breaths, Otsuka took the initiative and picked the topic for him. Because Midnight had passed, because it was their anniversary and Minato wasn't here. "Kakashi, do you want to know how Minato and I started dating?"

She was starting to feel more and more like Minato wouldn't come back home. It was a heart wrenching feeling, a deep fear. She had lived for her family all her life, she still did, but now she lived for herself too. It was something she was still working on, allowing herself to put what she wanted to do in front of always pleasing Minato or Kakashi. Defining the difference between what they needed and what they wanted.

And for a long time in her life, when her mother had ruled over the decisions Otsuka made, she didn't know the difference. But Minato, she was the first thing she allowed herself to want. She'd met him a few days after she'd turned 14. At first it had been to bring Shikaku's team bento's and when she'd found 6 people sitting there instead of 3, she'd handed the bento's to Minato's team and told off Inoichi, Shikaku, and Choza for not telling her sooner to make more lunch. Half an hour later she'd returned with more bentos.

When she'd first handed the bento over to Minato he'd waved it away.

Explained he hadn't wanted to take Shikaku's lunch, after all food made with someone in mind should go to them. Otsuka had been confused at first, but then she had seen the longing in his eyes. Longing for a family, for someone to care for and for someone to care about him. At the time she had simply smiled and said she would go back and make Shikaku more and shoved the bento into the blonds hands.

When she returned with more food she'd watched as the 6 talked about strategy and training. She'd heard something about a joint mission from Shikaku the day before. When they had all finished up Minato had insisted on helping Otsuka take a 7 bento boxes home and help with the dishes. On the way back home, Minato had talked her ear off about fuinjutsu after Otsuka asked one question about his training.

The way his smile and happiness never seemed to dim struck her. Despite the longing and loneliness behind his eyes, he moved forward. There was something about him that made her want to listen, that inspired her to make that loneliness disappear completely. And as she waved goodbye to him at the Nara gates she promised herself she would do everything in her power to do exactly that.

Later that day, when Shikaku had returned home Otsuka insisted that he bring Minato's team over more often, making up some excuse about bulk buying food being cheaper. Shikaku had just nodded and complied with her request. Everyday after that for the next three years (when they weren't off on a mission) Minato, Fugaku, and Hiashi joined Ino-Shika-Cho for lunch and Otsuka made them food. As Minato was clanless, she took on mending his clothes and anything else without even blinking an eye.

Otsuka couldn't pinpoint the moment it happened, the moment she began to wish for more from Minato than just friendship, but she could pinpoint the moment she decided. The moment she decided that she was going to go after something she wanted. Not for anyone else, not to appease her mother, but because *she* wanted to.

"Yes."

Otsuka was pulled from her memories by Kakashi's answer. She looked down and smiled at him. "Well, it was four days after Minato's 18th birthday. It was the only day everyone had free and so I decided to throw him a surprise birthday party."

~

“Shi, I have no idea what to make.” She was cleaning their bentos from earlier that day for lunch.

“Why don’t you just ask Choza to supply the food?”

“Because-”

“Otsuka, please tell me you aren’t planning on throwing that Namikaze boy a birthday party.” The voice snaps from around the corner. Shikaku watches Otsuka’s body go rigid and he narrows his eyes. His aunt had become more and more controlling lately. She didn’t approve of Otsuka’s crush on Minato and she certainly didn’t approve of her daughter dating someone.

Hanayo Nara was an oddity among the Nara clan, in the fact that she was not in fact a Nara by birth. She had been sponsored by the clan when she was younger and the academy still required a sponsorship if you weren’t a clan kid. Then a few years later she married Kame Nara, his father’s brother. Hanayo was determined, after Kame had died she had taken a harsh turn. Every waking moment she spent worrying about keeping Otsuka out of the hands of those who would hurt her and trying her best to put Otsuka in a spot where no one could touch her.

Kame had a mutation of the Nara Kekkei Genkai, it was dangerous and if it could be passed on the Nara clan would become all the stronger. However Kame had only ever had one child, Otsuka Nara, who had never shown any interest in becoming a ninja. The Nara clan was perfectly fine to let Otsuka live her own life, whether she passed down the mutation or not did not come before her happiness. But Hanayo knew a world clan kids didn’t, and she knew that Otsuka could be weaseled out of the Nara clan because she was technically only half Nara and Kame was dead.

So Hanayo had sworn to protect her child and she had. When she died, and Hanayo could feel her time coming, that duty to protect would fall to whoever Otsuka married. If Otsuka married out of the Nara clan, she could kiss what protection she did have goodbye. Namikaze Minato, prodigy or not, endangered her child.

“It’s just a small party Kaa-san. He’s turning 18, and he doesn’t have any other family to plan it for him.” Otsuka did not turn around to look at her mother. She knew the moment she did any fight she had would crumble.

There was a pause before Hanayo sighed. “You’re home less and less, and this is what you want to spend your time on? I suppose I can’t stop you.” The sound of her cane clacked loudly against the floor as she walked away.

Otsuka burned a hole into the sink, unmoving, and Shikaku felt a burning rage spark. Otsuka was for all intents and purposes his little sister, and he’d watched his aunt twist Otsuka’s emotions around on a whim all his life. But when Otsuka had finally, *finally,* picked something of her own accord her mother did this. It made him angrier than he’d ever felt before.

Shikaku reached over from where he was leaning against the counter to turn off the sink before it overflowed. Snatching up a towel he handed it to Otsuka. He didn’t want to meddle, Otsuka could and would get there on her own, but Shikaku had had enough of her mother.

“He loves anything you make.” When Otsuka doesn’t do anything but continue to stare at the floor, clearly at war with herself, Shikaku tries again. “Kashipan and Tonkotsu Ramen, your handmade noodles are probably his favorite.” He is completely making it up, in fact he’s pretty sure Minato has never tried her hand made noodles, but it does the trick.

Otsuka’s hands tighten around the towel and she takes a shaky breath. “I guess I’m not a very good crush if I never noticed what his favorite food is. It doesn’t matter, Minato deserves a family.” She pauses and stares off to the side. It doesn’t need to be her, but she wants it to be.

Minato whose smile glowed. Minato who felt like sunshine. Minato who didn’t ask for anything, just gave and gave and gave until he couldn’t anymore. Minato who talked for hours about anything he loved. Minato who had let her cry into his arms for hours after Shikaku almost hadn’t come home. Minato who, right before he’d left on his last mission, had scooped Otsuka up in a hug and almost kissed her.

She wanted.

It hurt, to be so at war with herself. She didn’t want to hurt her mother, to disappoint her or make her angry, to make her mother feel alone. But she knew that it was okay to want Minato, okay to go after him as long as he accepted her. She would just have to prove to her mother that she would never abandon her for someone else. Family

always came first, but maybe Minato could be family.

~

The party had gone amazingly, Otsuka honestly couldn't remember ever seeing Minato smile so brightly. He had gushed over his presents and complimented her endlessly on her food. Fugaku had ended up challenging him to a sparring match and the party had promptly been taken outside. It was only after everyone but Shikaku, Inoichi, Choza had left, the three had promised to clean up the house while Minato and Otsuka went on a walk.

So with a wave and thanks Otsuka had closed the door behind her and turned to smile at Minato. "So, you enjoyed the party?"

"I did, your cooking was amazing. I've never had your ramen before, it was like heaven." Minato started off on their walk catching Otsuka's hand in his. "Really everything you make is..."

It wasn't that Otsuka had stopped listening to him as he dragged her along but Shikaku's words were ringing in her ears. *"He loves anything you make."* Why had Shikaku said ramen if Minato had never even tried her noodles? How had he known Minato would love the ramen so much? And why was Minato still rambling on about her food as if it was- oh. Oh. It clicked.

"Otsuka?" She blinked herself out of her stupor to look at Minato's concerned face.

A flush pushed its way onto her face. "U-um, yes?"

"I asked if you wanted to watch the sunset tonight?"

"Oh! Yes, I'd like that. Hokage Mountain?"

Minato laughed. "You know me too well." He lets go of her hand to rub the back of his head.

Otsuka continues walking, this time headed towards the mountain top, she doesn't say anything but her hand feels cold now. "You know, one day we'll be able to sit on your head instead of Sarutobi-sama's."

"I wonder how spiky mine will be? If it's anything like Tobirama then-"

"We could always wet your hair right before they do the carving so it

will be straight."

"But then I'll look like a drowned rat!" Minato protests. Otsuka laughs at his pout and hopes that maybe, just maybe he likes her back.

"So not much different than you already look?"

"HEY!" He gave her a look filled with indignation.

"Sorry, sorry." Otsuka does not feel sorry at all. In fact she feels over the moon, talking to Minato always filled her with a rush of vivacity and cheer.

"Thank you." The jonin is staring up at the faces of the three Hokage. His voice is soft and she can tell he's got that ache for something more again. "For believing in my dream."

They reach the top of the mountain in a companionable silence. Otsuka can tell Minato is thinking again. She knows he is likely to get stuck in his own head if she leaves him be much longer.

Otsuka wants to ease the ache, the loneliness, the longing, everything. Minato had always put everyone before himself, and she was tired of watching him suffer. She reached out with her free hand and cupped the side of his face. It pulled him enough out of his thoughts that his eyes can focus on her.

Otsuka desperately wanted to be right. Desperately hoped that maybe she could be one of those topics Minato never shut up about, one of those things he cherished and loved. Moving closer to him she slowly brought her lips to his, leaving enough time for him to pull away. It was short and soft and it ended almost right after it started.

Minato's eyes were wide and the longer he stared at her the more worried she became. "Minato? Did you- Are you-" She didn't know how to word the question. She probably should have asked before she kissed him, but she also wanted to know if he was okay because the blond before her seemed to have broken. "Um, I'm sorry if you didn't want me to kiss you."

The question pulled him enough out of his daze for him to respond. "I-I-I-" His mouth hung open and Otsuka wasn't sure if she should laugh or cry. She really hadn't meant to hurt him or make him feel uncomfortable in any way. "No, I-you-It's just- I thought you didn't like-" He cut himself off again and closed his eyes. As he took a deep breath a blush pushed its way onto his face.

“Minato, if I made you uncomfortable-”

“No, no it isn’t that.” Minato opened his eyes again, the brightest smile Otsuka had ever seen making its way onto his face. Without even hesitating he was pulling her back against him, hands moving to cup her face the way she had done to him. “May I kiss you?” His face was close enough she couldn’t see anything but him.

“Yes!” Otsuka very nearly knocked their heads together the way she jumped forward to kiss him again, but Minato seemed to avoid it by tilting his head. The kiss was still a bit jarring but neither of them seemed to care. The feeling of something fluttering against Otsuka’s stomach almost hurt. The time Minato pulled away, smiling but beet red.

“How can someone be so beautiful?” He was giving her that look again, but this time it caused another round of butterflies to go off in her stomach.

“Ah- well,” Otsuka was certain that she was just as red as Minato was. “You’re beautiful too. And you-” She stopped for a moment as she thought about how to describe what she was feeling. “You make me *want* .”

“Want?” Otsuka isn’t sure if he’s confused or just surprised by her words.

“I want to smile and laugh with you, I want to kiss you over and over, I want to listen to you talk about fuinjutsu for hours. I want your time and care.” It’s an awkward way to put everything she’s feeling out in the open, but Otsuka isn’t quite sure how else to get across this feeling. The feeling that she wants to be something for someone not because she has any obligation to, but because she *wants* to.

It isn’t that she doesn’t love her family, doesn’t love her mother. It isn’t that she doesn’t want to help her mother, but she also knows that she needs to help her mother. She needs to help her mother because it is her duty as Hanayo’s daughter and to her family. She doesn’t need Minato, doesn’t need to look after him, doesn’t need to be there for him, doesn’t need to keep him happy. There is no obligation to do those things for him, she just wants to.

“I want to be with you because it’s what I want. Not because of anything but my own choice. Does that make sense?” Otsuka feels like she might explode. Minato is giving her the biggest smile she’s ever seen and staring at her with a gaze that makes her feel like she’s never

been more understood in her life.

“Yeah, it does.” His smile gets even wider before his blush finally starts to calm. It’s too much for Minato for a moment. The idea that Otuska, the woman he’s come to value the most in the world, could want him. “I like you Otsuka.” Minato whispers it softly, lips only an inch away from her own. “I like you, and I have for god knows how long. You’re so strong, always willing to give and help. But more than that, you became for me what no one else has, what no one else cared to notice.” After a few seconds of silence Otsuka follows up.

“Notice?”

“That I felt alone. You and Sensei are the closest thing I have to family. It’s because of you Shikaku is more of my friend than just an acquaintance. You were willing to be there for me and look out for me when even my parents wouldn’t and I-” Minato cuts himself off, but he holds Otsuka a little tighter. “Would you be willing to be my girlfriend Otsuka? Because I want to try this, I want to try being family and caring and…” He trails off when he realizes Otsuka is looking at him.

His determination is written across his face, and Otuska can’t help but feel like she wants to try just as hard as he will. There’s no hesitation when she answers. “Of course.”

Minato’s jaw drops “Really?”

“Yes” Otsuka gives her newly appointed boyfriend a confused look. “Minato I’m the one that kissed you.”

It takes a moment but Minato’s world stops spinning enough to realize she has a point. Then he kisses her like she's the most intoxicating thing in the world. His left hand finds the back of her neck to stroke it softly while the other locks their fingers together. Their teeth knock together as Otsuka tries to gently bite Minato’s lower lip and as Minato pushes their bodies closer he loses his balance.

The end up on the ground, a tangle of limbs and laughter. Minato feels ludicrously happy and Otsuka feels so delighted her heart hurts. Slowly calm down and move to sit by the edge and look out at the sunset.

The sun is beginning to set and it’s light makes Konoha sparkle. Otsuka takes in the dazzling view of the village glowing as it’s steeped in the sun's glowing rays. She’s seen it before and yet something about the way it looked now took her breath away.

~

Kakashi sighs and shakes his head. “Sensei is silly.”

Otsuka snorted. “Oh definitely.”

Chapter End Notes

It was kinda an accident to end up posting the romance chapter on Valentines Day but hey, it worked out.

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Minato, as it turned out, had single handedly turned the tides of the war, again. However, this time he was out with a severe case of chakra exhaustion and needed to be carried back to Konoha by Jiraiya. Kakashi had insisted on spending the night in the same hospital room as Minato so they'd been moved to a bigger room that could fit both beds. Minato remained out for a few days more, Tsunade assured them he was alright and he'd sleep it off. Upon waking up Otsuka and Kakashi had practically jumped him.

With a tired smile Minato had declared family time and the three spent the day piled into Minato's hospital bed. Otsuka read The Tale of A Gutsy Ninja for most of the day, only stopping when the nurses came in for food, and when Jiraiya, Shikaku, and The Hokage came in to get reports from Minato. Otsuka didn't hesitate to throw them out threatening castration. And if Minato and Kakashi sat with her as she shook in fear afterwards no one said anything.

"How's he doing?" Minato was staring at Kakashi, and Otsuka wasn't sure he was even blinking.

"He's recovering faster than Tsuande expected. He doesn't usually sleep through the night, but he might now that you're home."

"And you?" Minato's eyes flicked to Otsuka before settling back on Kakashi.

Otsuka knew, she *knew* , that Minato didn't need her to unload on him. He was offering, and that meant more to Otsuka than the world itself, because she knew he would do anything for her. But she couldn't, god she wanted to, because it felt like she was ripping apart at the seams, and she hadn't slept in weeks, and she was terrified she'd make a wrong step in handling Kakashi or one of her patients.

The idea of holding back from Minato was new. She'd always relied on him, for everything, but he didn't need this right now. He needed to focus on himself, Otsuka was sure Minato hadn't been sleeping well for months now, and she knew he didn't realize it but he had a haunted look in his eyes.

It took her a second to collect herself. She took a deep breath, and grabbed what few strands of sanity she had left and gave Minato a soft smile. “I’ll be alright.” Minato’s head snapped to look at her, he looked surprised.

“You don’t have to-”

“Minato.” Otsuka reached over and tugged on a longer strand of his hair, her grin widening when he pouted at her for it. She held his stare for a few seconds more. “I’ll be alright.” She wasn’t sure how much she believed it but she’d try her best.

“Okay.” He leaned back into the bed, sighing. He took a deep breath, and then another, and another, like he was reassuring himself everything was okay. Otsuka watched silently as Minato struggled to keep himself together. It was scary to realize that as much as she wanted to offer comfort, she didn’t have it in her to sit and really listen to what Minato was going through. Reaching out, Otsuka pulled Minato into an embrace and just took him in. He was home. That was enough for now.

Minato slipped his arm around her waist and rested his head on her shoulder and breathed her in. Otsuka was here, Kakashi was here. That was more than he could ever ask for. Anything else could come later, so he relaxed into his girlfriend and almost son, and waited for the sun to rise.

When the sun finally started to peek through the window Minato closed the book he’d been reading, it was some fantasy story Otsuka had bought when she was younger. Otsuka had moved to the floor after deciding she should start working and had begun pouring over documents.

“What’re you working on now?”

Otsuka looked up and smiled at him. “Laws. Kin and I have been looking into how we can start to teach more counselors. Currently there’s only three requirements, two ninja recommendations and one mental evaluation. From there you can be hired and moved into any position the head of the department sees fit.”

“It’s really that simple?”

Otsuka nodded. “It’s that simple. The only reason we don’t have more counselors is because we don’t have the budget for it. But Kin promised he’d figure out the budget for both my side department and

the department as a whole if I created the system by which we could teach and test our counselors."

"That doesn't quite seem like a fair trade-"

"He's been overseeing the running of everything else besides my current patients." She paused. "I don't know. I'm stressed but excited." She glanced back over at him to see him smiling at her.

"I'm glad." Otsuka held his gaze for a few seconds more before she went back to looking over her work.

"So Kakashi has another checkup with Tsunade today. She told me he should be released next week, but for the next month she expects him here every other day for a 10 minute checkup." She picked up the book next to her and began looking for a page while she continued. "Obito will probably come by today too, and Tsunade will probably let you go this afternoon. She gave you some medication to keep you asleep longer so you wouldn't go right back to expending chakra."

Minato watched her from the bed, fixated on watching her work and talk at the same time. "Obito is the one who helped find Kakashi right?"

"Yeah. He and Kakashi are best friends, though Kakashi would probably never admit it." Otsuka paused long enough to look up to see if Minato had reacted to missing Kakashi's recovery. But instead of seeing a look of disappointment he was giving her a dopey grin. She felt herself heat up and quickly went back to catching him up.

"Um, I finally have an assistant, Kakashi went over the final applicants and Shikaku sat in with me on the interviews. She's young and so sweet, sent by Kami himself. Her name is Mebuki, I really think you'll love her."

"I think I remember her application from when you first got them all. She looked promising."

"You've got no idea." Otsuka picked up a stack of papers and stayed silent for exactly 47 seconds while she cross referenced something from the book and papers.

"And things with Mikoto?"

"She won't tell me what you all have planned but I've been paying attention around the office. I hear plenty from the Intel division, more

than they probably realize."

Minato shrugged. "Shinobi have a thing with Gossip."

"I've noticed." Otsuka stood, slipping the papers into the open page of the book while she moved over to the bed. Minato frowned as he could see the slight limp she walked with. "Stop it."

He looked up at her and blinked innocently but she had a knowing look on her face. "It's not your fault, or Kakashi's, or mine."

"It's my job to protect you." He gripped the bed sheets harder, fingers going white. He was staring at her covered hip and Otsuka knew he was playing some image he had conjured of what happened in his mind over and over again.

Otsuka didn't have it in her. She couldn't walk him through the motions, to explain to him it wasn't his fault, she searched for the energy to pull out of nowhere, yearned for it, but came up empty. "Minato-"

She stopped, she had nothing left. Because she had started working to take her mind off of it. She was trying to ignore the pain Minato and Kakashi were in, because she knew she couldn't provide for both of them.She had to pick. And she loved Minato to the moon and back, more than she loved anything else in the world, but she'd pick Kakashi every time.

Minato looked up at her, searching, she could read it in every aspect of his body. He needed the comfort. He needed love from the woman who had become a beacon of hope and something to live for more than just the village. And she couldn't. She *couldn't.*

She tried again, to say something, anything. To smile, to find the last piece of energy she had and give it to him. To be what Minato needed.

"I-" She stopped again. "Minato I-" The world spun as she watched Minato realize just what she was thinking. His face was something between horror and grief. She watched him pull from his own depths, pull and pull and pull and his expression settled into the smiling happy-go lucky mask he wore for everyone except Otsuka. It broke her heart, and try as she might to find it within herself to stop him, she couldn't.

Minato reached out and grabbed her hand, giving her the most blinding fake smile of a lifetime. "It's okay, Otsuka. Don't worry."

~

Minato found himself in The Hokage's office the morning after he was released from the hospital. Jiraiya had stopped by to alert him to the summon and then insisted that they catch up over dinner that night. Minato was sure he'd rather do anything else.

"You did a good job Minato." Praise from the Hokage probably should have made him happy.

"Ah, Thank you Hokage-sama." Minato gave the man his signature smile but didn't move, sensing there was something else the Hokage wanted besides the verbal report.

"As I'm sure you're aware, I've asked you here for more than just your report." Sarutobi produced a file and handed it over.

Minato grabbed it and the minute he opened it his heart plummeted. And as guilty as he felt for it, he couldn't help but wish he'd been handed another mission assignment instead.

He grinned at Sarutobi. "Obito? I'm surprised the Uchiha are letting me tutor one of their own, especially if he hasn't graduated."

Sarutobi smiled at Minato. The boy had always been good at making friends. Sarutobi had no doubt he already knew more about Obito Uchiha than was in that file. "Since his father will be taking a longer mission he has requested a teacher for his son. Someone to take care of his kid incase of his death but also to make sure he doesn't strain himself learning how to use his sharingan."

Minato frowned at that. Kagami wasn't supposed to be sent out of the village anytime soon. As far as he was aware the seal hadn't been perfected yet and Kagami was the only one capable of placing it without anyone noticing. "How long should I expect Obito to be under my care?"

"For however long Kagami is out of the village. It might be best for Obito to stay with you while his father is gone. It wouldn't do for the young boy to live alone."

"I agree. Is that all Hokage-sama?" Minato could feel his mask slipping

by the second.

Sarutobi lifted an eyebrow but didn't comment. He stared at Minato a little longer before giving him a gentle smile. "You're dismissed."

Minato was out the door and out of the Hokage tower in less than a minute, doing his best not to break into a run or hiraishin in sight of anyone. The second he was out of the building and hidden from view he harshined up to the Hokage mountain. He stared out over the village and for the first time in a very long time he cried, alone.

~

Mebuki was surprised to arrive at work and find Otsuka in her office. Her boss had been at the hospital with Kakashi every day since she'd been hired. Usually at the end of her work day she stopped by the Hospital to check up with Otsuka and see if she needed anything and collect any finished paperwork.

"Otsuka-san?"

Otsuka's head popped up and she looked over at the door. She smiled when she saw Mebuki. "Hey! Minato agreed to watch over Kakashi at the hospital today so I'll be working in the office. You're late this morning, is everything okay?"

Mebuki blushed at being called out. "Oh-well, my mother just needed more attention this morning. I swear I wasn't trying to-"

Otsuka waved it off. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay." She sighed. "I scheduled an appointment with Hizashi-san today, he should be in any second. I finished a bunch of forms for The Hokage's inspection last night, if you could file the copies away and send his copy in by tonight that would be great. They're right over there." Otsuka pointed to a large stack of papers on the coffee desk.

Mebuki felt her eyes widen. Her boss's work ethic never ceased to surprise her. She walked over and heafted the stack of files into her hands and turned back to her boss. "Can I get you some tea or food?"

Otsuka blinked in surprise. "Oh, um no. Mikoto always brings me lunches on tuesdays. Well she usually insists on bringing me lunch

every day, but she's dealing with so much I got her to let up." She shifted in her seat uncomfortably and Mebuki could tell her leg was bothering her. She almost offered to get her ice but was interrupted before she could.

"Otsuka-san?" Mebuki startled herself into dropping the files all over the floor. When she turned around Hizashi Hyuuga was standing at the door.

"Oh Mebuki!" Otsuka began to stand to go help her assistant pick up the papers but Hizashi was by the girls side and picking them up and was already almost done.

"I apologize I didn't mean to scare you-"

"Oh no no, it's my own fault." Mebuki thanked Hizashi again before making her way out the door and closing it behind her. Hizashi turned to Otsuka and gave her a smile.

"Thank you for coming, Hizashi-san, I know I didn't explain a lot." Otsuka set the work on her desk to the side and pointed to the big nice fancy chair she had for her patients. "Please sit."

Hizashi nodded and continued to look at her expectantly. And really it was now Otsuka realized she hadn't planned or really even thought about exactly what she needed to say to Hizashi. She breathed through the burst of anxiety and gave the ninja in front of her a smile. She could do this, after all Minato was possibly the greatest smooth talker of all time and she had been watching him do this for years.

"It has recently come to my attention the Hyuuga clan has only had three clan members have shown up to their required evaluation in as many years." Which was true, the Hyuuga clan had more of an aversion to mental evaluations than the Uchiha. "You are one of those three so I thought it best to broach this subject with you before going to Hiashi about it."

"Otsuka-san this is not-"

"Please, call me Otsuka." She needed Hizashi to see her as a concerned peer. "I recognize how rude I've been going to you first, but to be frank I'm not sure that I can take this issue up with Hiashi."

Hizashi's eyes narrowed but he didn't say anything.

"While Konoha is unable to get involved in clan affairs, individually

the Medical Intelligence division, who oversee the mental health evaluations of ninja." Mebuki had come up with the name and Otsuka quite liked it. For now she was sticking with it. "As I only have records of three Hyuuga within the past couple of years actually coming to their evaluation, once all of the laws Kin and I have proposed to the Hokage come into effect all but those three Hyuuga will be pulled from active duty."

Hizashi looked like a perfect mask of emotion. The digging Shikaku had done had revealed the reason most Hyuuga didn't go to the mental evaluations was because they were either branch and as a result may be forced to reveal clan secrets if the evaluation uncovered the seal, or they were apart of the main family and were too proud to think they needed any help.

"Otsuka-san," Hizashi said carefully. "I appreciate the warning. However my clan will take it up with the Hokage. Many Hyuuga believe you will pry for clan information." And it made sense, counselors weren't trusted by most ninja, and certain clans like Hyuuga and the Uchiha were even more paranoid.

"Well Hizashi-san, I understand the concern. But I believe that any information that the counselors would glean from these evaluations would be things that greatly affect the mental stability and work ethic of those ninja. Afterall, It's my job to make sure our ninjas feel as safe, comfortable, and *free* as they can within their own walls." That time Otsuka caught Hizashi tensing. He'd caught her meaning, though she hadn't been very subtle about it.

"You should not go digging for clan secrets." The way Hizashi said it, she knew he was warning her. He gave her a hard look before he stood to take his leave. "Excuse me Otsuka-san. I have another appointment I cannot miss."

Otsuka felt her heart beat a little faster but she gave the man a smile. She'd really hoped for more information out of him, but she should have known better. "Thank you for your time Hizashi-san. Please just remember Konoha's will of fire can easily be wielded to burn cages." She paused. "Of other villages that is. Oh and by the way there's a dinner at Choza's house the first of next month. Both you and your brother are invited!"

Hizashi stared at her for a long moment and Otsuka didn't let her smile drop. "Thank you."

When he closed the door she waited until she was sure he was out of ear shot to let out a breath. She wasn't quite sure if that had gone better or worse than she'd expected. Either way she'd gotten almost no information out of him. Otsuka wondered absentmindedly how ninja did this every day of their lives.

Chapter End Notes

> I think it will be quite a while until I post again. I'm going to try to write a few chapters ahead so I can go back to posting regularly like I was when I first posted this story. Tell me what you think of this chapter, I'm honestly not sure what to think myself but I decided to just post it for now and come back to it later. I really want to flesh out Hizashi and Otsuka's interaction.

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Minato had never experienced a moment quite like this in his life. He had gone home to shower and change. But instead of being greeted with a warm welcome home, the delicious smell of food, or even the sight of Otsuka curled up on the coach as she waited for him to return home he had grown accustomed to in the close to three years they'd been dating, he was greeted with a cold apartment.

There was a visible layer of dust over almost everything, he wasn't quite sure the last time Otsuka had even been home, but it had to have been at least a week. The air was stale and he was sure something in the fridge had gone bad. He stood in the doorway to his apartment.

Suddenly he was a chunin again. His last mission had given him enough money he was sure that he could afford to move out of the orphanage. It would be tight but it was the cheapest thing that matched the standards of his Uchiha and Hyuuga teammates. He hadn't wanted to admit to himself he was embarrassed about his own living situation, and he knew it was stupid to be spending more money to impress his teammates but they were the closest thing he'd ever had to family. He had wanted to make them proud.

It was the first decision Minato had ever made that hadn't been based on reason and logic. Which was probably why it backfired on him a few months later when the rent for the apartment was raised. Jiraiya had ended up coming to the rescue, and paid for half the cost of the apartment until he'd made Jonin a few years later.

He had never really hated his apartment but it was strange at first. It was lonely and cold, and when Minato left on long missions he'd return to a stale, dusty, awful smelling apartment. And some nights he'd allow himself to imagine what it would be like to have a family. To come home to a brother or sister making fun of him, to have a mother or father welcome him back from a long mission and worry over him. When he was older he'd yearned for a girlfriend or boyfriend, someone who cared.

And he knew, he knew, Jiraiya cared. That Fugaku and Hizashi cared.

That he should be happy and satisfied with what he had, with the people who did care about him, but it never filled the hole.

He'd never said it aloud, though he was sure Jiraiya knew and Otsuka suspected, but he used to dread coming home. To an apartment that was just so *empty*. He bought so many things to try to fill it, books upon books, expensive decorations, fancy dishes, tea sets he never touched, an entire spice rack that he hadn't even bothered to put spices in.

And suddenly the apartment that had become so wonderful and joyous to live in, the place he'd first met the boy he considered to be his son, the place he'd come to learn to love, his home, had become the reckless buy of a yearning thirteen year-old again. And he *hated* it.

He wanted nothing more than to burn it to the ground and never look back.

He stood in the doorway and watched as a gust of wind came through the door and blew the dust around. It was almost laughable. How easy it was for something you loved so much to become so awful, so disgusting in an instant. To watch something he cherished *rot* before his eyes.

He stared at it a few moments longer. He wanted to leave. He could go curl up in Otsuka's office in that chair in the corner that looked and felt like heaven. And just not think about it. To let it stay here and rot. He never needed to see it again.

He stood. There was an eerie silence. And he stayed. In the doorway. Didn't move, didn't breathe.

It was rotten. It felt like he was stepping back into a time in his life he never wanted to go back to. But there was some small part of him that still loved it.

This was where he had met Kakashi. This was where he re-engineered Hiraishin. This was where he had escaped to when the horrors of war were too much. This was where he'd spent hours talking on the couch with Otsuka. It was a testament to how much he had worked and how far he had come. To him the things he loved and cared about were worth more than the haunting loneliness.

He stepped inside. It was still rotten and the horrible feeling didn't leave him, because his mind was still walking the line of a much younger Minato and a much older Minato, but it eased. It was enough,

and Minato supposed he'd have to settle for enough right now.

~

Minato had no delusions about his teaching skills. There was simply no way that he would be picked over an Uchiha to train Obito in the sharingan. If anything it should have been Fugaku taking care of Obito if Kagami wasn't going to. Mikoto and Kagami were cousins afterall.

Kagami trusted Fugaku and Mikoto, and he might have on some level trusted Minato but the two were not well enough acquainted. And Kakashi had barely even been his student for a month, because Minato certainly didn't count letters as teaching. No Obito was being given to him for a different reason.

Because he wasn't affiliated with any clan in any official way. He hadn't married Otsuka, and he was an orphan who didn't know his parents. It was why people hadn't cared when he'd been given permission to teach Kakashi, the last Hatake and a prodigy. It was why it would be easier to let him teach Obito, who had just become a prodigy himself. But also, he had kept Kakashi out of Danzo's hands and The Hokage and Kagami were expecting him to do the same with Obito.

Except Minato would have a harder time taking care of Obito. He wouldn't be able to claim any Jounin-sensei right to step in as a parent like he could with Kakashi because Obito hadn't graduated and Otsuka was too far removed to step in as a family member. No, it was that the Hokage didn't trust the Uchiha, and he didn't trust Danzo so he had decided Minato was the next best choice.

Minato was really starting to get tired of how much trouble Danzo was causing him but he wouldn't be able to do anything about it until Kushina returned and who knew how long that would take.

He was on his way back to the hospital when he saw Hizashi leaving Otuska's workplace. He frowned. Hizashi wasn't one to drop in unannounced and Minato was fairly certain Hyuuga's refused counseling. It was perfectly reasonable to assume Hizashi could be there to visit anyone else but Otsuka had a penchant for getting into trouble. He turned, deciding to stop by Otsuka's office, he needed to discuss Obito moving in anyway.

Otsuka's office wasn't far from the entrance of the building, it was down the hallway once you got past the lobby. But instead of one secretary desk there were now two, with a young pink haired kunoichi sitting at the smaller desk.

"Mebuki-san?" Mebuki lifted her head from her desk surprised but recognition ran across her face when she saw him.

"Oh! You must be Minato-san!"

Minato smiled and nodded. Watching her as she subtly hid the paperwork she had been working on from him. "Is Otsuka free?"

"Yes, you should be able to go right in."

"Great, thank you." Minato bowed his head and made his way down the hallway, glancing back at her as she took a sip of her tea. He knocked on Otsuka's door but didn't wait for a come in before he went in.

Otsuka looked up from the paper she was reading and gave him a weak smile as he closed the door behind him. He took a moment to look her over and assure himself she was alright before he moved to sit on her desk. "Your secretary is good."

"Isn't she?" Otsuka sighed and glanced behind her as if she could see Mebuki through the wall. Placing the paper she was reading on the desk next to her, Otsuka stood and threw her arms around Minato. He hugged her back and let himself bask in her presence. She was here, safe and sound, and just as stressed as she always was.

Neither of them said anything for a while but by the way Otsuka's grip tightened on him Minato could tell she was thinking about last night. It had hurt watching her struggle but he more than anyone else understood. They'd talk about it later, for now Obito was more important.

"Hokage-sama informed me this morning that Obito is being moved under my care. I'm supposed to start tutoring him outside of the academy and he's asked us to take Obito in while Kagami is out of the village." Otsuka went rigid in his arms.

"You're supposed to help him with his sharingan? Why isn't he going to stay with Mikoto and Fugaku?"

"Apparently Kagami asked for me specifically."

“But Mikoto is his cousin, and Obito should be trained by an Uchiha. Why would Hokage-sama-” Otsuka stopped when she saw Minato’s face.

“They want to keep Obito out of Danzo’s hands.”

“Mikoto could do that just fine, besides wouldn’t leaving him with the Uchiha make it harder for Danzo too…..oh.” Minato watched as Otsuka came to the same realization he had. Her expression was a mix of terror and anger. It didn’t bode well for the Uchiha. The Nara, Yamanaka, and Akimichi clan had reached out and shown favor to the Uchiha clan but with the KPD trial around the corner public opinion was bound to plummet.

“We’ll have to get another bed for Kakashi’s room so Obito can sleep there for the time being.”

Otsuka sighed. “At least they like each other. Does this mean the Hokage will offer to let Obito graduate early as well?”

Minato honestly had no idea. In recent years the age for academy graduation had gone back up but with the war there was no limit to how old a child had to be to enter or graduate from the academy. He’d read through Obito’s file and dropped by the academy this morning to watch the boy from afar as he interacted with everyone.

He was generally liked by the other kids, it really only seemed like it was the other Uchiha clan kids who didn’t like him, but they tried to kiss up to him anyway. Unlocking the sharingan must have improved how they treated Obito. His grades were atrocious but his skill and stamina during recess had led Minato to believe he might not test well.

Obito reminded him a lot of Kushina, he was a rambunctious and lively kid. He seemed to genuinely care about those around him and wanted to impress his teachers even though they only scolded Obito for his distracting behaviour and grades.

At the academy Minato had learned very quickly that while Kushina’s grades were bad she knew the material as well as any of the other kids if not better. At first he’d thought that Kushina just didn’t feel like trying but as he’d grown closer to her he learned that it was the format that didn’t work for Kushina.

Obito was 9, and had another year before he was supposed to graduate but graduation times could be moved and with the amount

of casualties Konoha had taken it would make sense for the Hokage to try to push more genin out of the older classes. Which left Minato in charge of two almost genin.

“Maybe.” Minato would be lying if he said he wasn’t worried.

Otsuka folded her arms. “Well I’ll see about getting a spare mattress from my old house. But the house is a mess, I haven’t kept anything clean and there’s barely room for Kakashi in his room and I don’t want Obito sleeping in the living room.”

“Well” Minato took a deep breath. He’d been thinking about this after he’d realized his apartment was too small for just the three of them and if Obito was going to move in there really would be no space. Otsuka and him hadn’t talked about marriage let alone buying a house together, but the thought made his heart stop. “We could look at buying a house.”

Otsuka’s eyes snapped up and she froze as she stared at him. The seconds passed in grueling silence and Minato was terrified of his girlfriend’s answer. Her arms were still crossed but she was still staring at him, face surprised.

“You want to buy a house together?” Otsuka uncrossed her arms and her fingers dug into the hem of her green shirt.

“Yes?” Minato’s heart rate sped up, and there was a growing sinking in his gut.

“But last night I- you want to take such a big step even though I-” Otsuka didn’t quite seem to know what to do with herself. She swallowed before nodding to herself and looking back up at him. “You want to commit to being together for-,” she swallowed hard, “for a long time?”

“Yes.” Minato answered instantly. His hands reached out and coaxed hers into relaxing the tight grip on her shirt. “Do you?”

“Yes. It’s just I’ve been so swamped with work and trying to take care of Kakashi but I haven’t been able to And I’d love for us to have our own house.” She said it softly but Minato heard it clearly. He wasn’t quite sure what to do with himself as a rush of excitement overtook him and he moved to sweep her off her feet. He kissed her and she wrapped her arms around him as he twirled her around in the air. They laughed together as they spun and suddenly nothing could bring either of them down.

~

Otsuka and Minato agreed not to tell Kakashi about looking for a new house until he was back home and settled. Obito would move in once they had gotten the house situated with another bed and other necessities for Obito.

Kakashi was set to come home any moment, and Mebuki had agreed to help Minato bring Kakashi home while Otsuka, Shikaku, and Yoshino prepared the house. Otsuka hadn't even realized just how bad a state the apartment was in until Minato had insisted that they clean it fully before Kakashi came home. He'd offered to help her but she wanted Kakashi to have more time with Minato, she knew he wouldn't say it but he'd missed Minato as much as she had.

Yoshino had ended up offering to help with the deep clean and she had descended on the fridge before Otsuka could even think about refusing. Shikaku had been rangled into cleaning by his wife, but after Otsuka had over exerted herself for the third time trying to air out Kakashi's room he'd made her sit on the couch and done it himself.

There was a knock on the door before Otsuka could hear Minato faintly say 'Just open it.' and the door swung open to reveal Minato carrying Kakashi, Mebuki carrying the last bag of stuff from the hospital, and Tsunade and Shizune who had come to make sure Kakashi was properly settled.

Kakashi looked like he was pouting at being carried but upon seeing Otsuka he broke his pout enough to wave at her before Minato turned down the hallway.

They all filed in slowly and followed Minato down the hallway into Kakashi's room to put Kakashi down. The room had been cleared of the bookcase and desk into the living room by Shikaku and Yoshino, and most of the extra boxes of things had been placed in Minato and Otsuka's bedroom as the small closet was already filled.

"Shizune setup the monitor." Tsunade's voice boomed out of the room and Otsuka smiled. While Kakashi still had a lot more to recover he'd be on his feet in no time she was sure, and it felt wonderful to have her family back home. Shikaku gave her a pat on the head before he headed into the small room too and Yoshino rolled her eyes.

“He just doesn’t want to help make dinner.”

“I’m surprised he even helped as much as he did.” Otsuka said, swinging around to pay more attention to her cousin-in-law.

“He’s worried about you, even though he won’t say it. You’ve been running yourself into the ground lately Otsuka.” Yoshino pulled out some ingredients from the newly stocked food.

“I know, there’s just so much I need-”

“Pace yourself Otsuka.” Yoshino’s voice was stern as she started to chop up celery. “You’re just like your mother, she never let anyone help her either.”

Otsuka stopped at the mention of her mother. Yoshino had a point. Her mother had taken everything on herself, even when she insisted Otsuka take care of her, it was more Otsuka taking care of the house or her grandfather. Even after her mother had been injured, asking for help was about keeping Otsuka home.

But Shikaku, Mikoto, Kushina, Yoshino, they were all busy with so much other work to do, how could she pile more onto their plates. Two nights ago she had been so willing to pile all her worry onto Minato and when he’d asked for help she had just…

She didn’t like thinking about it, but it had been hovering in the back of her mind since it happened. Minato had needed her and she hadn’t been able to give him what he needed. How hard was it to say a few words of assurance. At the moment it had felt like the most daunting task in the world but the longer she thought about it the more she hated herself for not being able to say a handful of words.

“Otusuka, I’m going to head home.” Mebuki’s words pulled her out of her thoughts and Otsuka tried her best to shake off her thoughts as she stood. She walked her to the door thanking her. Yoshino didn’t say anything as Otsuka closed the door but she gave her a look and the look was enough for Otsuka to decide it was time to leave the room.

She walked into Kakashi’s crowded room, and moved to sit on the end of Kakashi’s bed. Shizune and Tsunade had just finished setting up a wide variety of Machines that Otsuka did not understand at all. Tsundade was trying out a new type of gene therapy? It was supposed to help Kakashi heal much faster so he’d be able to be up and move around within the next two weeks, but since it was still technically experimental Tsunade had insisted on moving in some machines to

monitor Kakashi. She'd stop by every other day to make sure they were all working, but apparently if something went wrong she would be alerted and make her way over as fast as she could.

Otsuka didn't understand it all, but she knew as long as she didn't touch them they'd be fine and she figured she could ask questions when Tsunade stopped by.

"Well that's everything. Now if Kakashi you stay in bed until I give you the okay to be up and walking around you'll be out of this bed faster. If not Kami help me I will chain you to a table in the hospital and you won't leave until you are completely healed." Tsunade gave him one last glare before she made her way out of the room, Shizune following behind her.

"I'll go check on my wife." Shikaku said as he left, closing the door behind him. It wasn't subtle but none of the three minded.

Minato moved forward and squatted at the side of the bed before ruffling Kakashi's hair.

"Hey!" Kakashi swatted at Minato's hand and Minato laughed.

"So how does it feel to be out of the Hospital?" Otsuka asked, smiling at him. She could tell how happy he was just from the form of a smile under the mask.

"Good. Do you think I'll be able to start training in time for Graduation?" Otsuka had no idea, Kakashi still had a long way to go in his recovery but she hoped for his sake he'd be out of bed and returned to his normalcy as quickly as possible.

"I'm not sure, but we'll see. But for now you can just enjoy Minato being at your beck and call while you're at home."

"Oh Sensei! Does this mean-"

"Actually," Minato cleared his throat, eager to change topics before the two started planning ways to trick him. "We have some news for you."

"Are you finally getting married?!" Kakashi shouted, leaning forward fast enough that Minato was startled off balance and his butt hit the floor with a loud thud. Laughter from outside the room followed.

Otsuka and Minato were both lit up like christmas trees, and it took

Otsuka a few moments to gather herself enough to stutter no.

“Oh.” Kakashi looked put out and Otsuka tried not to think about the fact that she’d agreed to buy a house with Minato just yesterday.

“Actually, I have some news about your friend Obito.”

“Is he okay?” Kakashi asked, surprised. He didn’t even know Minato knew the two were friends.

“Perfectly fine, it’s more that Hokage-sama informed me that I’ll be overseeing Obito’s training with the Sharingan. So he’s going to be your new teammate!” Minato smiled at Kakashi, and reached out to ruffle his hair.

Kakashi’s eyes widened but he didn’t say anything. A few moments passed before Minato felt Otsuka’s hand reach out and squeeze his. He knew she was encouraging him to continue before he could get caught up in the sinking feeling in his stomach that Kakashi would hate him for taking on another student.

“Kakashi, I want you to know that no matter what happens, you will always be my student and-” He stopped himself before he could say son. Kakashi had never known his mother but he had loved his father and Minato wasn’t going to take those precarious memories away from Kakashi.

“A-are you not going to teach me anymore?” Kakashi’s voice quivered.

“No! No! Of course I’m still going to teach you!” Minato flailed for a moment before he decided to reach forward and wrap Kakashi in a hug. “I just didn’t want you to think I was leaving you behind. I didn’t word that right. I’m sorry Kakashi.”

Kakashi didn’t say anything but he returned the hug. Something warm blossomed in Minato’s heart. As he stared down at the mop of silver hair he realized he had never been more thankful to Kami for meeting Kakashi.

Otsuka left the room soon after to do some work, leaving Kakashi and Minato to chat and promised to bring them dinner once it was ready. Then Minato rummaged around in the boxes until he found a card deck and settled down near Kakashi’s bed to play Go with him.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter took me much longer than I intended it to. I'm struggling with how I want to write Minato and Otsuka's relationship moving forward. Obviously they have some things to work out on their own and together and I'm trying to adjust the plot to fit them because I want to focus more on exploring their emotions and relationship.

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Lots of crying, otherwise please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mikoto hadn't told Otsuka she'd come that morning, so she'd expected Otsuka to be stressed and maybe a little surprised. Not upset, not angrier than Mikoto had ever seen Otsuka. She'd been about to knock when the door opened and Minato had *ran* past her. He hadn't even greeted her, just hirashined once he was out of the house but she was almost certain she had seen tears in his eyes.

And then when Mikoto had gone in search of Otsuka she had found her in her room sitting on the bed glaring at nothing.

"Otsuka?"

Otsuka blinked and turned to look at Mikoto, the rage on her face dimming. "Oh, Mikoto, I didn't realize you were coming over?"

"I only just decided to come over this morning…" Mikoto shut the door behind her as she stepped further into the room. Kakashi didn't need to hear this conversation. "Something happened." She said it matter of fact, because she wanted to know if she needed to murder Minato Namikaze and hide the body, current Uchiha problems or not.

"I-" Otsuka stopped and breathed through her nose. "We got into a fight."

"About?" Mikoto seated herself on the side of the bed in front of Otsuka.

"The Hyuuga Seal."

~

Minato had asked her what was on her mind. And it was early enough that Kakashi wouldn't be awake for another hour. The perfect time to

talk about what had been on her mind since she'd had that talk with Hizashi. So she'd told him, explained to him the horror of what every branch member was forced to endure. Minato hadn't been surprised. He'd known.

And in hindsight Otuska supposed it made sense because Hiashi was Minato's genin teammate. But she'd expected more from him. Because when she'd proposed her idea he had said no.

"Absolutely not."

Otsuka was floored, because honestly that was the opposite of the reaction she'd expected from him. "W-what?"

Minato sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Otsuka I can't meddle in clan business. If we were found out we'd be tried for treason. Especially because we have Kakashi. I won't risk losing him to anyone."

But that was bullshit if Otsuka had ever heard it. Minato didn't back down from anything. "So what? Let Konoha allow its own people to be enslaved!?" And she couldn't believe it.

"I'm not saying it isn't horrible."

"But you won't do anything about it because what? Hiashi was your teammate and Hizashi wasn't? Minato if anyone could convince Hiashi to change-"

"Otsuka I will not take a risk that could lead to us losing Kakashi." She could see it in his eyes, the fear.

"So you're going to let-"

"I am not letting anything!" Minato turned towards her on the bed more. "I have no power over the hyuuga clan. If I could change it I would, but it isn't that simple."

Otsuka felt her stomach drop as her anger grew. He could be as terrified of losing his family as he wanted but it wouldn't make it right. They had the power to do something about this. He was one of the few people in the world with the connections and sealing experience to do this and-

"Otsuka." His voice wavered and she met his eyes. It was like he was bearing himself to her. She wasn't used to seeing him scared, he

always hid it from her, and it was enough to calm her down.

“I-I get it Minato.” She reached out and squeezed his hand, shifting more towards him. Her voice was softer now. “I know how scary it is to think we could lose Kakashi, but you are one of the only people- no, the only person who can do something about this. We can’t condemn so many people to live their lives enslaved because of what could happen.”

Minato’s face morphed into something she couldn’t read as he pulled his hand out of hers. “Condemn? It is not my job to fix every problem in Konoha. Don’t put this on me.” He stood and moved to grab something out of the closet.

Otsuka froze for a moment as she watched him tear clothing from hangers to change into his jonin uniform. She had overstepped and hurt him when she hadn’t meant to. “You’re right, it's not your job to fix every problem in Konoha. I didn’t mean it that way.” She bit her lip as she tried to think through the right thing to say before he fled the room. “That was a rather manipulative way to put it. I’m sorry.”

He stopped for a moment, gripping the shirt he’d just taken off a little harder. “Do you see where I’m coming from though? Otsuka you and Kakashi are everything to me, I can’t, won’t lose either of you.” He looked up to meet her eyes.

After a few seconds Otsuka nodded. “I do. So we won’t do it in a way that will risk that.”

“No Otsuka I won’t do it all.” Minato pulled his shirt over his head to break eye contact with her.

“Minato please-”

“I SAID NO!” It comes out much louder than he meant it, and he thanks kami that there's a silencing seal around their room when the door is closed. He doesn’t dare look at Otsuka. He’d never yelled at her in his life, and Otsuka had never been someone who could handle confrontation from her family. He didn’t want to see her staring at him with that look of betrayal and fear.

“Fine.” Her voice is quiet and surprises him but he can hear the resentment in it and his heart clenches. “I’ll do it without you.”

His eyes flick up at that and she isn’t even looking at him. “I won’t let you Otsuka. You can’t-” He swallows his words when he sees how

angry it makes her.

“Can’t what?” Otsuka meets his eyes to challenge him. “Really Minato what can’t I do?” And she means it. And she pushes down the anxiety because she knows she’s being antagonizing to get back at him. And she knows it's wrong but says it anyway because these are people's lives.

Otsuka can see the war waging within him written across his face but doesn’t break eye contact. And waits. It’s almost a full minute before Minato finds his words.

“You can’t put Kakashi in this situation. How is it fair to him for you to put his life in danger because of something you want to do.” He finishes. It wasn’t what he originally was going to say. But it was the only thing he could think of that would make her stop. Make her understand because she blamed herself for what happened to Kakashi and maybe she would see his side.

“Put his life in danger?!” Otsuka just gets angrier and any hold she had over herself is gone.

“Otsuka, it’s our job as his parents to do what's best for him! If we do this and get found out it’s like handing him over to Danzo. No one else will be able to step in and save him. Maybe once Danzo is finally out of the way we can revisit the conversation. For now we need to do what's best for Kakashi. Think about it Otsuka-”

“Stop.” Otsuka is panting. Her breath is short and she can barely get words out. It’s like her mother is in front of her scolding her. Manipulating her into doing whatever she wanted again. And she can’t do it, she can’t do it anymore. “Please go.” She can barely force it out and she doesn’t look at Minato. She can’t tell what he’s thinking and honestly she doesn’t want to either.

“Otsuka-”

“Go.” And he had.

~

When she had finished her story Otsuka had broken into sobs and

Mikoto pulled her into a hug. Soothing her by rubbing her back and rocking slightly.

But Mikoto was furious. Because maybe Otsuka had said things she shouldn't have but Minato knew how far Otsuka had come. Finally out from under her mothers grip and he'd been so willing to manipulate her because he was *scared.*

It was the cry for Kaa-san that stopped Otsuka's sobs. She had bolted out of Mikoto's arms and into Kakashi's room. Mikoto heard Otsuka apologize and promise to get Kakashi breakfast and Mikoto took the time to let herself calm down a little more. There was something that made her even angrier about Minato's words. He had been very willing to help her with taking down Danzo, and if they were found out they'd certainly be executed. The plan was almost ready too. She needed to have a talk with him.

She finally stood and walked into the kitchen to bid Otsuka goodbye, promising to bring back lunch later, and went off to find one Minato Namikaze.

And find him she did.

~

She found him sitting atop her cousin's roof, Kagami was still out of the village and as far as Mikoto was aware Obito was currently at the academy. Fugaku had informed her that Obito was being put under Namikaze's care and while she had been angry at the Hokage's blatant disrespect and distrust she knew Obito would at least learn something from him.

That was as long as she didn't skin Minato alive. He deserved it as far as she was concerned. He was a hypocrite if he thought it was fine for himself to commit treason but draw the line at his girlfriend doing the same.

"Namikaze." She greeted coldly, appearing behind him via a shunshin. Minato didn't say anything, just continued staring at the street as he had been. And it only furthered Mikoto's anger. Well if he wasn't going to respond. Her foot only missed him by a millimeter, but it got him to look at her. "Don't ignore me."

Minato's stare was unsettling, but Mikoto was married to Fugaku, she was an Uchiha who had been dealing with the whispers about her clan for years and could face down her clan elders. She liked to think she could dish it out as well as he could.

"Yelling at your girlfriend for being willing to sacrifice herself for the good of others, when you're already doing the same thing isn't very becoming of you."

"Mikoto, I don't need you to rub it in my face." Minato sighed, running his hands through his hair. The carefully set mask of calm falling apart. Mikoto thought he might cry.

"Pull yourself together Namikaze, go home and apologize to your girlfriend. She may not know how much of a hypocrite you are, but I do. And rest assured I will rip you apart if you keep this up." Mikoto crossed her arms as she forced down the chakra that wanted to activate her sharingan as she felt her emotions start to get the better of her.

"I know. I-" Minato swallowed hard. "She's going to hate me now."

Mikoto scoffed. She seated herself next to him. She loathed him, but she wasn't here for herself. She was here for Otsuka. "Otsuka will never hate you. You could destroy an entire shinobi village and she'd still think the world of you." And it was scary how true it was. Mikoto knew better than anyone else that Otsuka would never look at another person the way she did Minato. "She loves you, and you may have both said stupid things but that doesn't overwrite the love you have. Unfortunately Otsuka see's something in you, and -" Mikoto stopped herself.

She shouldn't admit to Minato she wanted to be him more than anything in the world.

"You don't understand. I told her-"

"I know exactly what you told her." Mikoto snarled. "She gave me a thorough overview of your fight. Maybe you don't get it Namikaze, because you're wrapped up in your own little world, but if you think for one second you're anything less than the most important person in Otsuka's life, you're delusional."

"But Kakashi-"

"Is her kid, of course she loves him. But you're the one Otsuka

depends on. She may have started to learn how to work for herself, but she does it for you too. Everything she ever decides is with you in mind. So stop moping, apologize, and work it out."

Minato didn't respond for a few seconds before he met her eyes and she could see the determination in his eyes. And it broke her heart, but for Otsuka she would lay her life on the line. For Otsuka she'd give up her Sharingan without a second thought.

"Thank you Mikoto." He stood and squared his shoulders before he continued, quieter this time. "I know you-"

"Just go. Please just go." And Minato went in search of Obito and left Mikoto on the roof to cry. To cry for herself, for Otsuka, and a life she would never have.

~

"Mikoto, will you be able to sneak the senbon past the Root guards?" Inoichi asked, he was seated in the Uchiha head's house with Fugaku and Shikaku next to him.

Mikoto sighed and twirled the very senbon he was talking about with her fingers. "Yes." Her response was soft, ever since she'd returned to the house Fugaku could tell she was upset.

"We'll make sure it gets to him by tonight." Fugaku continued in Mikoto's place. He hesitated. "I must thank you again Shikaku, Inoichi, without you I fear that this situation would have worsened the clan's current beliefs."

It had taken him quite a while to trust Shikaku when the man came to him with information regarding the incident between the uchiha police officer and the civilian they all suspected was a root agent. From there they had come to trust each other enough that Fugaku had felt safe sharing his concerns about the clan once even Mikoto had decided that they needed help from outside the clan. The elders were getting too bold.

"It's no problem Fugaku, you would do the same for us." Inoichi gave him a smile as he and Shikaku stood to leave. The favor was implied, and while Fugaku didn't want to owe anyone favors he knew just how

much he owed these two men.

He waited until they were far enough away they wouldn't overhear before he turned to talk to his wife. In recent years their intimacy had dwindled until it was non-existent. He had had his suspicions on what had caused this for a long while until Minato had arrived at his doorstep this afternoon to explain what had happened with Otsuka this morning.

Minato had been looking for advice on what to say, and had told him Mikoto had been the one to first kick some sense into him, quite literally. And when Mikoto had come home somber and looking like she had been crying, he was certain his original suspicions had been correct. He'd never confronted her about it, because their marriage was never meant to be for love. Even though their relationship had turned into love with time, Fugaku felt Mikoto owed him nothing.

But tomorrow he'd be called back out to the front lines, which Fugaku knew was on purpose considering the trial would start in two days. Mikoto alone would have to handle the clan, the trial, and both of their parts in the plan. So maybe it was time he told her. Because Mikoto was still his wife, and even if her feelings had changed his hadn't.

"Mikoto." He entered the Kitchen but didn't make a move to go any closer. She had started cooking dinner. They'd eat before she left to deliver the senbon that would help the uchiha free himself from the genjutsu he'd be placed under before he went to trial.

"Yes?" She didn't turn to look at him, just kept stirring the pot of soup.

"I leave tomorrow." He wasn't sure how to approach this subject with her, even if he knew it was important he did so.

This time Mikoto stopped what she was doing and turned to look at her husband. "Are you worried about me? It will be a lot of work but Kushina will be back tonight and she and Otsuka will be able to support me. You should focus on keeping yourself safe."

Fugaku gave her a sad smile. "I am worried, but not because I don't think you can do this. Mikoto I know that if you wanted the moon you could figure out how to get it." He moved closer, reaching for her hands. "I do not know what happened this morning but, I can guess."

Mikoto went rigid, her eyes met his, studying them carefully. He could

see the war raging in her as she tried to decipher if he had actually figured it out or was wrong and thought it was something else. He loosened his hold on her hands and continued.

“I’ve known for a long time how you feel about Otsuka. It changes nothing, you are still the Mikoto I fell in love with.” He lifted his hand to cup her face. She was shaking in his hands. “Know, before I go, that I will always be on your side, no matter what you decide to do. If you choose to go after Otsuka I will step aside. If you choose to leave the village I will do everything in my power to help you. You-” He gave her a rare smile that spread from ear to ear. “You are my best friend Mikoto. That will *never* change.”

Mikoto choked back a sob. Her arms came around him as she pulled him into a hug and sobbed. “Thank you, thank you Fugaku.” Fugaku just tightened his hold around her in response

~

It took Minato ten minutes before he found the courage to open the door. So when he finally pushed open the door Otsuka was waiting, sitting on the small step up into the kitchen and living room. He stared at her, surprised. A flash of anxiety cut across his mind before he stamped it down. He would not run from the feelings and this talk.

He maneuvered himself carefully and shut the door behind him before seating himself next to her on the step. Neither of them said anything. Waiting for the other to speak up first. It was while Minato tried to gather the courage to speak up, Otsuka finally spoke.

“I dismissed your feelings. Your feelings are important.” Otsuka turned her head to look at him. “You are important. And whether or not I think we should do something about the Hyuuga seal I shouldn’t have gotten so angry or tried to force it onto you. I knowingly let myself lash out because I wanted to get back at you. I’m sorry.” Otsuka stopped to consider her next words. She knew what she wanted to say but she wanted to make sure it was completely clear.

“I think we need to talk more about the seal but also, that- that night you came back. It felt like I was trapped. Like there was nothing I could do. You needed comfort and because it felt like I was so alone I thought I couldn’t. That I didn’t have the energy. But I did, I do.

Really, I think that I just need to talk to you more. We don't communicate very much, everything is unspoken and I can't expect you to always just understand. " Minato finally met her eyes.

He waited a moment to see if she was done and then reached over and tucked some of her hair behind her ear. "I understand." He smiled at her as something within him lifted. Because while he had been afraid to apologize and be turned away, he felt like she understood. Which eased away the lingering anger he hadn't even realized he'd had.

He let his hand fall away and took a deep breath before he started. "I have something to tell you." He shifted so he was fully facing her. "Mikoto, Kushina, Shikaku and I have been working on something that's as dangerous as what you proposed. And I was willing to let you lose me to something risky but wasn't willing to let you risk yourself." He took another breath. "And I tried to manipulate you to get you to stop. What I said about Kakashi was horrible and wrong."

Minato watched Otsuka as she listened. Her face was impassive. He bowed his head to her before he said, "I'm so sorry Otsuka."

"I know. And I forgive you. We both are at fault here and, well it's about time we start communicating more." Otsuka leaned into Minato, exhausted.

Minato shook his head because Otsuka never ceased to amaze him. And he grabbed her hand and brought it up to his lips to kiss her palm. He watched some of the tension in her body relax and did it again.

It had been a long time since they fought, and Otsuka was right. They used to communicate more when it was earlier in their relationship. But after Otsuka's mother had passed Minato had been struggling to do everything he could to make Otsuka happier while missions picked up as war approached. And then he'd left for war and it had taken him much longer to come home then he'd expected.

It reminded him of their last major fight. Her mother had told her she was lazy and when he'd found her crying he'd gotten angry enough to confront her mother. Her mother had had no problem laying him out flat and ripping him apart. But Minato hadn't given up arguing with her until Otsuka had come home and told him to get out.

And right as he'd been leaving he'd heard Otsuka's mother comment that Otsuka had done nothing but cause her problem since the day she was born and it had been the final straw. He'd surprised even himself

with his response as he turned around and told Hanayo Nara that she didn't deserve her daughter.

Of course her mother had just rolled her eyes and left but Otsuka wouldn't talk to him for a week. They'd smoothed things out later but it had involved more yelling than conversation. It was then that Otsuka had admitted to him that she had been more angry at him for making her realize he was right. That she didn't deserve to be treated that way and she was more than just her mothers tool.

He tried to get her to come stay with him then but she'd refused. She knew her mother was getting sicker and sicker even then. Otsuka had said something that had stuck with him, "I love her, and I don't think she will be here much longer. And my anger means nothing in the face of losing her. I can be angry later."

Minato had been in awe of her strength. Because he wished his parents were alive more than anything. Even if it meant they had abandoned him. But he wasn't so certain he could put the resentment aside if he ever did find out they were alive. That moment had changed his perspective of her forever; without a doubt she was the strongest person he knew. That moment had been the moment he realized he wanted to marry this woman.

"What're you thinking?" Otsuka asked and surprised Minato out of his thoughts.

He gave her a wide smile. "About you." She blushed and Minato laughed. "How did I manage to land such a wonderful girlfriend?" Otsuka shrugged and twisted her hand out of his grasp to tug on his hair. "Hey!"

"You didn't answer my question."

Minato sighed dramatically. He couldn't get anything by her. He flicked his eyes up to meet hers and smirked. "I was just thinking about how much I want to marry you."

Chapter End Notes

> Please comment! I try not to be a comment whore lol but I realized your words always help me feel motivated to write more. Either way I'm not totally satisfied with this chapter but I'm excited to show you were things are going. The next chapter is gonna be a lot of things, and I'm very excited for it!

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Every clan head, that was in Konoha, was in attendance that day. Only the Izunaka, Uchiha, and Hyuuga's heads were absent, and even then they all had temporary heads present. Additionally most of the Uchiha clan had turned up to watch the first day of proceedings. Otsuka had come with Kushina, who had only arrived home a few hours ago. They were seated further towards the back because neither held a position that would allow them on the council or near the stand.

They were waiting for Uchiha Saburo to show up before they would start. Otsuka leaned over to Kushina's ear. "Shouldn't he be here by now?" She was nervous. She knew this trial could decide the future of the entire Uchiha clan.

Kushina turned to respond to her but was cut off by the door slamming open. "Hokage-sama!" The entire crowd turned to the Jonin that had entered the room. "Uchiha Saburo has escaped!" And suddenly the room was in uproar. Otsuka glanced around to find Mikoto, and was surprised by the smirk that was written across her face. Had Mikoto helped him escape? There was no way Mikoto would do it, she knew if Saburo escaped it would spell disaster for her clan.

A quick look at Shikaku's furrowed eyebrows told her that he and Inoichi hadn't known about this. Except, when Shikaku's eyes met hers from across the room she knew in that moment, they had a plan. He probably hadn't meant for her to realize, but Otsuka could read her cousin like an open book. What were they planning?

"Silence!" The noise stopped just as suddenly as it had started. The Hokage calmly turned to the Anbu beside him. "Put out an alert, Uchiha Saburo has escaped. I want every jonin mobilized in the next two minutes and looking for him."

"That won't be necessary Hokage-sama." Sarutobi looked up to find one Uchiha Saburo in front of him, his hands were free but he was still in his inmate uniform and his chakra was still sealed. "I am here. Please forgive me but I was held up. I was placed under a genjutsu

and unable to escape it until I-" He stopped, his face contorting as if he was in physical pain. "Fell."

"A genjutsu?" Sarutobi was standing, his gaze sweeping over the council to his left. "Inoichi!"

"Yes Hokage-sama?"

"I want you to confirm Saburo's story."

"Hokage-sama Saburo did not agree to a mind invasion last time. I cannot do so now without your express permission or permission from Saburo."

"Mikoto-sama?" Saburo asked, looking at his clan head's wife. She nodded to him and he turned to Inoichi.

"I was unable to get approval directly from my clan until now." And Sarutobi knew it was a lie, Mikoto had visited Saburo last night according to his Anbu. But he held his tongue, this looked quite a lot like one of Shikaku's plans. He wouldn't say anything until everything had unfolded before him. "I give you permission, Inoichi-san."

It only took Inoichi a few seconds before he pulled away from Saburo and moved towards the Hokage. He leaned down to whisper something in his ear. "Hokage-sama. I reviewed the memories. Both of his stories are true."

"Are you certain of this Inoichi?" Hiruzen was feeling too old for this. To have such a big mole during war time spelled nothing good.

Inoichi nodded. And in a rare moment of anger he lost control. His eyes flicked up to find Danzo's face before he realized his mistake and covered it by studying the rest of the council and crowd. It was telling that one his most trusted ninja had such a reaction. Hiruzen sighed.

He didn't want to think about what Danzo might have done this time. Wearily he stood to address the crowd. "Uchiha Saburo." The ninja in front of him straightened. "You are hereby cleared of all accusations." And the crowd exploded.

"Hokage-sama!" It was Mikoto this time that called over the noise. Surprising considering this was in her best interest.

"Yes?"

“How do we have proof Inoichi wasn’t put under a genjutsu himself?” And that accusation stunned him.

“You would suspect your own clan member?” Choza asked.

“Forgive me Hokage-sama, Choza-san, but I cannot trust Uchiha Saburo until he is proven innocent. He was charged with a crime and the UCPD must thoroughly investigate all avenues of possibility. That includes our own clan. No one is exempt.”

And that right there, told Hiruzen all he needed to know. Shikaku was good, and if Mikoto and Fugaku had been willing to trust Shikaku with the future of their clan then maybe he should reconsider his own bias against the clan. He smiled. There was hope for Konoha and the Uchiha yet.

“Your fear is unfounded Mikoto-sama. Saburo is still under his Chakra suppressing seals. He only has access to enough chakra to keep him alive. But we will check just to be sure. Kushina-san, would you please check Saburo’s seals?”

Kushina stood, and she was smiling as she made her way over to Saburo and poked and prodded him a few times. “These are Uzumaki seals, Hokage-sama.” She flicked Uchiha Saburo in the forehead and her smile widened. “Yep! Working just fine, dattebane!”

~

“Ow ow ow! Minato?!” Otsuka called out from the bathroom. Minato glanced up from the book he was reading to see the bathroom light flooding into the bedroom.

“Yes?”

“Can you come help me?” Closing the book, Minato placed it on his nightstand before making his way to the bathroom. Popping his head in revealed an amusing sight. Otsuka had managed to entangle the comb into her hair enough that most of the brush was hidden from sight. He bit his lip to keep from smiling.

“How did you manage that?” Otsuka had always had short hair for as long as he’d known her. He’d assumed the stress of the last few

months had caused her to forget to go get it cut and consequently her hair had grown out.

“I haven’t combed it in like two weeks…” She sighed because she really hated taking care of long hair, but even if she were to cut it now she’d still have to comb through the knotts. She finally let go of the end of the comb to give him access. “Just get it out and I can do the rest.”

“I don’t mind.” He smiled at her in the mirror and set to work on detangling his girlfriend's hair. Like he had the skill of a 100 years, the comb was out in no time and Minato was gently teasing the knots out of Otsuka’s hair. She watched him in awe.

“I didn’t know you were so good with hair…” Minato flushed, mumbling something under his breath. “What?”

“I said, I’ve had to do this with my own hair a lot.” He cleared his throat and went back to studying Otsuka’s hair intently.

“But your hair is straight.” Minato’s blush deepened.

“Ah, well you see I never like taking your braids out and by the time I do…” Minato trailed off, stopping his work.

“Oh.” This time Otsuka was blushing. She had never realized how much of a hassle her braiding might have been. “Well I can stop-”

“No!” Minato met her eyes before he realized his own words and his eyes widened in embarrassment. He hesitated and then continued quieter this time, “I-I like when you braid my hair…. it just gets curly afterwards and I always forget to brush it through afterwards and then, well, you know.”

Otsuka smiled at him. It meant a lot to her that he liked it so much. And staring at him now she was reminded of his words a few days ago. *I was just thinking about how much I want to marry you.* “M-minato, do you think-” She curled her fingers into her shirt. “What you said on friday…”

Minato continued brushing out her hair and avoided looking at her face. What if she was upset with what he had said? Had it been too soon? They hadn’t talked more about moving in, let alone marriage. He really should have known better. What if this ruined their entire-

“Sometimes I think about that too.” It had been running across her

mind ever since Kushina had asked her that night a few months ago. And when she looked up to see Minato giving her a happy simile she knew that it would be okay. Maybe they hadn't talked about it yet, and god she was embarrassed, because what if she rejected her? But they would, eventually.

~

Otsuka didn't hesitate to move to the kitchen to help Choza's wife as she prepared food for the party. Aki and Choza had married only a few months ago before the start of the war, and this was the first time they had hosted a party quite this big.

Minato set Kakashi down, who had been cleared to start walking around a few days ago, and smiled at the young boy. "I need to have a chat with Hizashi, do you want to come with me?"

"Yes sensei, please keep me away from all the women…." Kakashi's shoulders dropped a little. He had been receiving all sorts of visitors at the apartment since leaving the hospital and he was rather tired of having his cheeks pinched. Minato chuckled.

"Alright then! Let's see if we can help your mother out." Minato winked at Kakashi and moved towards where he could feel Hizashi.

When Otsuka had approached Minato again this time, he had listened. And when she told him her full plan he was shocked. He hadn't forgotten his girlfriend was a Nara, and he had always known that Otsuka acted more like a shinobi than a civilian, but she had planned down to the very words he needed to say.

He found Hizashi sitting alone staring off further into the Akimichi clan compound. There was an empty seat next to him which told Minato Hizashi had been expecting him just like Otsuka had promised.

Find him and stay relaxed. Ask about the day, the weather, anything that's clearly not important but will get his attention, but don't meet his eyes. Minato flopped into the chair that was next to Hizashi and sighed contentedly as he looked at the sky. Kakashi looked at him a little confused but after a moment of looking at Hizashi and weighing his options he decided to sit in Minato's lap.

“Mah Hizashi, it’s a wonderful day isn’t it?”

He could feel Hizashi’s sharp gaze settle on him, and he only smiled wider. He ruffled Kakashi’s hair as he pulled himself into his lap. *Wait for him to respond. It doesn’t matter if it takes an hour, don’t move, don’t look at him, and just wait. It shouldn’t take Hizashi more than four or five minutes. I warned him about you and unsettled him enough that he shouldn’t resist too long.* He settled in for a long wait, because if Hizashi was anything like Hiashi, Minato knew he’d be here a while. But Otsuka surprised him yet again when Hizashi spoke up at exactly the four minute mark.

“I know what you want Minato, but I cannot give it to you. I know you have the best of intentions but-”

“Okay.” Minato agreed pleasantly, and stood up, adjusting Kakashi so he was carrying him. He turned towards the door back into the house and began walking. *Now this is where the gamble is. You need to leave once he tells you no, don’t prepare to stop expecting to leave. And if he doesn’t stop you then plan 1 failed and you can come find me. If he does stop you, don’t turn around, and make sure you don’t make eye contact. He’ll say something along the lines of...*

“Minato-san. We are a proud clan, it is imperative we protect our eyes. We cannot simply give our pride up for the sake of freedom.” Minato had to fight the urge to laugh because Otsuka had guessed it almost word for word. He met Kakashi’s confused gaze and winked at him.

“That’s hardly a problem Hizashi-san, freedom and protection can co-exist. Sometimes you just need to bend the rules a bit.” *Pause for dramatic effect and then add* , “For instance I might say something like a barrier seal?” *And then meet his eyes.*

Hizashi was staring at him, shocked. Because the answer had been that easy hadn’t it. And Minato, Kushina, and Jiraiya, who had all known about the Hyuuga’s birdcage seal beforehand, and knew much more about fuinjutsu than Otsuka did had never even considered it. It had shocked Minato too when she had asked him if it would work.

“A-are you sure it would work?” Hizashi had abandoned any pretense he might have been using before.

“Yes.” And Minato made sure that Hizashi knew with complete certainty that Minato could and would do it.

And Hizashi didn’t hesitate to respond. “Then I have something to

give you."

When Minato stepped into the house his eyes met with Otsukas from across the hall. The copy of the birdcage seal was safely tucked away in a storage scroll of his own. She gave him a questioning look and Minato gave her the biggest smile he could. And he watched Otsuka *glow*. And watched as she struggled not to erupt in joy at the success of her plan. And Minato felt his heart explode in joy with her.

"Ne Kakashi," He asked quietly, "the view from here is breathtaking isn't it?"

Kakashi just nodded.

~

Kakashi breathed in, out, in and out and then slammed his hand down onto the floor. There was a puff of smoke before a small pug was revealed in front of him. He heard his Kaa-san's "awww" from the kitchen and looked up to see Minato giving him a proud smile. Kakashi's heart swelled. He had done well.

He had finally been cleared to use Chakra and Minato-sensei had decided the best thing to do for him was start summoning. Because the Hatake clan's contract worked differently than most summoning contracts, it would only take the amount of chakra it took to summon them and there would be no drain afterwards, this was the best chakra exercise he could do without over exerting himself.

And Sensei had said something else about companionship and teamwork but Kakashi hadn't really been listening past "summoning contract".

"Do you have a name?" Kakashi asked. The pug didn't respond, just stared at him. "Can you talk?" He got a long dry look at that. So no. "Well I'm going to name you then, hmmmm-"

"What about Inu?" Obito asked from his spot on the couch. Kakashi glared at him.

"I'm NOT naming my dog, dog you idiot!"

“Hey! It’s a good name!”

“It’s a terrible name.” Kakashi turned back to the pug before him. And it came to him like a lighting strike. “Pakkun. I’ll name you Pakkun.” And then Kakashi scooped up the small dog and sat him on the counter. “Now,” He continued seriously. “You’re going to need to start learning to talk and fast. Let’s start with your name. Pah-”

And that was that.

~

Kushina frowned as she looked down at the village.

“Something wrong?” Minato asked. He appeared next to her, startling her.

“Gah! Don’t do that Minato!” She threw a kunai at him as pay back but he doged it effortlessly. She sighed as she went back to starring. She was studying the seal Kagami had placed from afar. She could feel it draining the Kyuubi's chakra slowly. “I suppose I’ll be spending a lot of time here while we wait for the seal to have enough power.

“What, you don’t want to see my handsome face everyday?” Kushina was trying very very hard not to smack him.

“Please, you look like a toad.” Minato choked and Kushina smirked.

Coughing Minato glared at her until he recovered enough to speak again. “It’s Mikoto isn’t it?” And Kushina knew she couldn’t hide anything from Minato, so why had she even tried.

“I’d rather not have to see Fugaku fawn over Mikoto while she fawns over your girlfriend. No offense.”

“None taken.” Minato placed a hand on Kushina’s shoulder and smiled at her. “Otsuka and I are moving soon. I just paid for it yesterday.” He pointed towards where the giant house was settled in the middle of a large plot of land that was surrounded by mostly trees towards the outskirts of the village. “There will be more than enough space for you to move in.”

Kushina shook her head. “No, I know Otsuka wouldn’t mind having

me but when Mikoto comes over it will be even worse. I don't think-"

"Hey." Kushina met Minato's eyes, and was surprised by how serious he was. "I'm not offering just to get you away. You're family Kushina, *I* want you to stay with us."

Kushina felt herself blush from head to toe. "Okay, okay, as long as I don't have to hear you and Otsuka going at it at all hours of the night! You better keep it down, dattebane!"

"K-kushinaaa!" She smiled as Minato turned redder than her hair. For the first time since she had come back to Konoha, she felt happy, really truly happy.

Chapter End Notes

> So as a heads up, we are approaching a MAJOR time skip, It should happen in chapter 34. Additionally, I think everyone is going to be VERY excited about next week's chapter. Thank you so much for the lovely comments they meant so much to me! Please tell me what you think of this one!

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

> It's my birthday today so I'm giving you this chapter early! Also it's FINALLY happened..... Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Konoha was winning the war. It was a good thing. But Danzo had heard Hiruzen talking about going to Iwa with a messenger asking about treaties and that had been the last straw. Between Orochimaru, the Uchiha, and Hiruzen his plans seemed to have been backfiring at every turn.

But there was still hope for his plans. He knew of an anbu team with an Uchiha on a mission, he still had the right connections that leaking the information of the mission to Iwa would be easy. It would get him sharingan earlier than expected and keep the war going.

Danzo sighed. Hiruzen must be going senile because Danzo had to do everything himself these days.

~

Moving day had been a lot less stressful than anyone had expected. Minato had sealed the entire contents of their apartment into a few large scrolls, Minato and Kushina had brought them over to the house and between Obito, Otsuka, Minato, Jiraiya and Kushina it had been really easy.

Of course Pakkun had helped too by making sure Kakashi hadn't over exerted himself and stopping him any time he tried to pick up something that was heavier than a book. The little Pug was a fast learner and Otsuka had quickly come to discover that Kakashi having something to watch over was good for him.

Kushina had barely anything to even fill her room, a bookcase, bed, and two storage scrolls were the current contents of her room. Obito's room, while only temporary, had somehow managed to have more than Kushina with his variety of stuffed animals that made it hard to

get to the bed. Minato had promised Obito that even though when his father came back he'd go back to living in the house, this room would be his forever.

Kakashi's room, surprisingly enough, was filled with more things than anyone else's. He had dedicated an entire corner of his room to Pakkun, with his bed only slightly to the right of Pakkuns corner. Minato had given Kakashi his old desk, considering Minato now had space to have an office outside of Kakashi's room again. The desk was positioned between the windows and door, and already covered in Kakashi's current sealing work. Since Kushina had started coming over more often she had added on to Minato's pile of work for Kakashi.

And Otsuka had the urge to laugh at her own shared bedroom as she walked into it again to set down the last stack of books. They had taken the biggest bedroom that had large windows overlooking the backyard. But the only furnishings were the bed and the stacks and stacks of books surrounding the bed. It looked rather like a maze.

"Otsuka, I found more books in Kakashi's-" Minato stopped as he walked into the room. "Oh…." The two shared a glance before Otsuka broke down laughing. Minato grinned at her.

"Maybe we should make one of the empty rooms in the basement a library? Between the two of us I think we're gonna need one." Otsuka asked, her smile felt so big her face hurt.

"Sounds good to me!" Minato turned on his heel, books still in his hands and made his way out of the room to find a room suitable for a library.

And even though they'd decided to move the books, Otsuka still set the books in her hands down to just stop for a second. This was her new home. Her house. Their house. And Kami was it *huge* . Otsuka had thought they could do something moderate. Something they could grow into but almost instantly Minato had insisted they get something bigger. And Otsuka hadn't been able to deny him, not that she really wanted to. She liked the idea of sharing a big house with a big family.

Of course when Minato had shown her this one she had choked on her own spit. This was bigger than many of the main houses she'd seen in most clan compounds. And the price tag had scared her but Minato had assured her he had more than enough money to pay the entire thing off that day. When she had seen the way his eyes lit up as he showed her around the house she had known this one was it. So when

he was done and asked her what she thought she'd just replied with 'Yes.'

Minato had cried in her arms that night. Otsuka held no delusions about why she knew this apartment had begun to cause him more pain than comfort. Besides, as long as she had a say over how it was decorated, she didn't care too much about where they moved.

"Kaa-san, Kushina and Jiraiya put the couch and coffee table in the living room and well-" Kakashi just shrugged but Otsuka could see the amusement in his features.

"Well considering that the living room is the size of our old apartment I'm not surprised at all. We'll have to go furniture shopping tomorrow." Otsuka followed Kakashi down the stairs to the living room and laughed when she saw Jiraiya lounging on the couch that was sitting alone in the middle of the room.

"What do you think?" Jiriaya asked, a smirk plastered across my face.

"That we have a shopping trip planned for tomorrow." Otsuka responded.

"Why tomorrow?" Kushina asked. "We've already finished unpacking and it's not even noon! Let's go now!"

Otsuka glanced outside and nodded. "We can get lunch out while we're at it."

"Sounds perfect!" Minato appeared out of thin air and wrapped his arm around Otsuka, "Sensei can pay!"

Jiraiya spluttered. "Minato! Pay for your own things you leech!"

"Hmmm, maybe I should tell Tsunade-sama about that one time you bought-"

"Fine! Fine!" Jiraiya was already ushering Kakashi and Obito out the door. "Come on everyone, we have things to buy!"

"Was that really necessary?" Otsuka asked Minato, but she was still smiling at him. Minato shrugged but his face told her he was enjoying every moment of this.

"Don't worry. He has more money than he knows what to do with."

~

“You do not need a stupid dog bed that big.” Jiraiya was arguing a losing battle against Kakashi, Obito, and Pakkun.

“But Pakkun needs a place to sleep in the living room! And what about when Kakashi gets more dogs for his pack!” Obito was shouting at the top of his lungs, and had attracted the attention of the entire market. Otsuka had been about to step in about five minutes ago but Minato had stopped her telling her Obito and Kakashi needed to win the argument on their own together.

“Hey Otsuka, what about this!” Kushina called from a few stalls over. They’d picked up almost every piece of furniture they could possibly need, but Kushina seemed to have found a stall selling rugs among various other items. She slipped away from the fight to inspect the luscious gold carpet Kushina had pointed out.

“Wow this is stunning.” As she ran her hands over it she was surprised by how soft it was. Glancing at Kushina she knew instantly that the woman had already fallen in love with the carpet. Otsuka turned to the stall owner, reaching for her own wallet because she had expected Jiraiya to stop paying for everything at some point, even though that moment hadn’t come yet. “Excuse me, we’d like this one. Can we have this put in a scroll please?”

And one quick exchange of money and goods later Otsuka was handing it back over to Kushina. “Here, for your room.”

“Wha- Otsuka!” Kushina’s face began to flush. “I can’t take this!”

Otsuka just smiled and forced it into her hands. “Yes you can, it’ll look beautiful in your room anyways.” She turned away, planning to walk away before Kushina could try to make her return it, but was distracted by Minato.

He had moved onto a clothing stall, and had pulled on a long coat to try out. Otsuka had always found Minato attractive, from the moment she’d met him she’d been struck by just how handsome he was. She didn’t tell him what she thought often, partly because it slipped her mind and partly because she assumed he knew the effect he had on her. But there was something about seeing him in that coat that reminded her just how beautiful her boyfriend really was.

Otsuka's face *burned.* And Otsuka couldn't remember a time she'd felt quite so light headed and then Minato's eyes met hers and he smiled at her sheepishly before saying "I look silly don't I?" and Otsuka knew she was doomed.

Before she knew it Minato had pulled off the coat and was frowning at her. His hand came up to feel her forehead and his frown only deepened. "You feel hot, do you feel sick? Are you lightheaded at all?"

She wasn't sure what came over her really. Because Minato was shining before her, even though he had a look of concern over her face, and they hadn't even *really* begun to talk about it yet. And Otsuka knew that this was really not the time of place in a market, in the middle of the day, with no privacy and it certainly wasn't a romantic setting but she had asked anyway.

"Will you marry me?"

Minato froze, his face morphing into a look of shock. Otsuka suddenly became aware of how loud she'd asked the question because everyone else was staring at her too. Kushina's mouth was hanging open and Kakashi looked like he might faint from where he was a few feet away. It was like time had frozen as Otsuka registered everyone else's reactions and watched Minato go through about 50 different emotions himself.

A radiant smile spread across Minato's lips. His hands came to cup her cheeks as he finally settled on a look of pure unbridled joy. "Yes Otsuka. Kami, yes."

She pulled him into a kiss, savouring the way her heart was beating out of her chest, the way he tasted like the takoyaki they'd shared only 30 minutes ago, and the euphoria that erupted from the feeling of his arms wrapping around her. Because Otsuka Nara was going to marry Minato Namikaze and god did it just feel *right* .

Chapter End Notes

> So not going to lie I accidentally posted the draft of Chapter 31 last time and because I'm lazy I've just gone and added the most significant missing part from Chapter 31 to the beginning of this one. As always, I am still a comment whore and will appreciate any thoughts you have!

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

> This one is a bit of a wrap up chapter but please tell me what you think after! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shikaku was shocked, which didn't happen often. But he was berating himself because honestly he shouldn't have been surprised in the first place. Otsuka had always had a knack for surprising him. Still when he'd come home to Minato flitting around his house in a daze while Yoshino was talking with Otsuka he'd known something was up. Then Minato was in front of him shoving his hand in Shikaku's face.

"Looook! Shikaku look! I'm *engaged! To Otsuka!* Can you believe it? Look at the ring she bought me!" Minato kept talking but Shikaku just pushed him out of the way to question Otsuka.

"You proposed?!" He sounded a little distraught, and forgive him if he was because his *little sister* had proposed and he hadn't even seen it coming.

"Well it was spur of the moment, but yes. And I meant it!" The last part came out defensive and Shikaku took a step back, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"You two are more trouble than you're worth." Shikaku sighed. He locked eyes with Yoshino and she just grinned at him. Shikaku thanked every god in existence at that moment that none of his friends had actually bet on Otsuka proposing, otherwise Yoshino would've murdered him before he even got to have a child.

"Did he buy you a ring yet?"

Minato grabbed Otsuka's hand and presented it to Shikaku, flashing his own ring with hers. "Yes! And they're *matching!"* Minato was grinning at him like he'd just discovered the secret to life itself.

Otsuka blushed as Minato wrapped her in his arms and stood. "Sorry Shikaku, Otsuka wanted to tell you first but now we have to go tell everyone else! Like Inoichi! And Tsume! And The Hokage, oh oh and the toads!"

Shikaku groaned.

~

Kakashi hesitated at the door to Obito's room. He could hear Obito's sobs but he didn't know if his presence was wanted. Pakkun nudged his arm and then looked meaningfully at the door. Kakashi sighed, Pakkun always made him do the toughest things.

He pushed the door open, and his chest constricted. Obito looked so sad, and Kakashi had never seen him anything other than happy. Sensei and Kushina had come home and Sensei had asked softly to speak with Obito privately. Then he heard Obito start screaming but Kushina had stopped Otsuka when she went to go check on the two and explained what had happened.

Obito's father had died. Just like his had, not in the exact same way but Kakashi knew. He understood.

Kakashi moved closer slowly until Obito looked up at him from his seat in Minato-sensei's lap. "W-what do you want?" Kakashi wasn't sure what to say, what to do. He wasn't sure what would help. But whenever Minato-sensei was sad Kaa-san would give him a hug and tell him she loved him.

Kakashi set Pakkun down in Obito's lap and wrapped his arms around Obito awkwardly. "I love you." Kakashi said. "Even though you're an idiot." He added as an afterthought. Obito made a sound between squawking and sobbing. Then Obito started hugging Kakashi even tighter, crying and snotting all over him. Kakshi just stared up at Minato helplessly while he let Obito smother him in snot and tears.

Minato gave Kakashi a proud smile and pulled the two further into his lap. Kakashi wondered if this was what a father was supposed to be, like his sensei. He hoped so. Then Obito squeezed him even tighter which Kakashi didn't think was humanly possible and all Kakashi could think about was focusing on supporting Obito.

~

Otsuka frowned. “No.”

Jiraiya raised an eyebrow from his place across the kitchen island from Otsuka. “No?”

“No.” Otsuka made it clear her decision was final by going back to reading her notes. It was getting late, and one of the few evenings she was free. Between work, helping Obito, and planning a wedding Otsuka had found her freetime all but gone. Not that she really minded, everything was important and well, she’d gotten some semblance of a healthy work schedule recently.

Jiraiya had taken up a temporary residence in one of the rooms in Otsuka’s house. He was in and out of the village so often she and Minato had offered to make one of the rooms his and let him come and go as he pleased. Logically Otsuka knew he wouldn’t be here much longer, but recently she had a feeling he’d been trying to get on her nerves.

To give Otsuka credit it had taken him right up until this very moment to actually irritate her. It had helped her calm down at first to remind herself that this was Minato’s teacher. Even if he was an open pervert he had cared for Minato when he was younger, Minato cared a lot about his teacher in return. In fact Otsuka was certain if Jiraiya had asked at any other time she wouldn't have cared.

“That’s not very hospitable of you Otsuka. My teammates and I were simply hoping for a place to relax! Mah, it’ll only be a few hours! Pl-”

“Jiraiya, I made my decision. Please accept it.” Otsuka didn’t even look up from the page she was reading.

Jiraiya huffed. “Fine, I’ll just go ask Minato.” The man started to stand but was stopped by the crack of Otsuka banging her journal down on the kitchen island.

“Who will tell you the same thing because I already made the decision.” Otsuka met his gaze and her frown deepened.

“Well this isn’t just your house you know, you didn’t even pay for it. Besides, you don’t think Minato will side with his teacher? Tsunade and Orochimaru-”

“Can meet up with you in one of their own houses. Tomorrow is the

second month anniversary of Obito's father's death-"

"Which is exactly why they should come over! A little company will help distract the gaki from-"

"No, it will only end up in further crowding the house. Obito doesn't need stimulation from people he doesn't know. He needs to be supported by those who care about him! If Tsunade-san comes then Dan-san will come with her and you and Orochimaru-san always get into heated arguments when you're around each other!" Otsuka caught herself before she continued on to drag Jiraiya through the mud for his own insensitivity. "Please think about what's best for Obito."

Jiraiya's eyes narrowed and he glared at her. "I am-"

"We're Home!" The door opened to reveal Minato, Kakashi, and Obito. Otsuka felt her heart race at the sight of her fiance. He would side with her, wouldn't he? She'd fight for her decision either way but Jiraiya had gotten under her skin. Why was she worrying about this? Minato would do what was best for Obito. That she could be sure of. Otsuka began slowly relaxing her body bit by bit as she took a second to calm her breathing.

The moment Minato had opened the door he had known something was up. His eyes narrowed as he looked from Otsuka to Jiraiya. Then he watched his fiance's eyes widen and for a moment she had looked at him in *fear.* It had disappeared as quickly as it had appeared and then he'd watched her subtly use calming techniques she only ever used when she was on the verge of a panic attack. Minato leveled his teacher with a glare that made the older man's blood run cold.

Still there were children present so Minato plastered on a smile. "Kakashi, Obito, go wash up and then I want you both to finish your homework. I'll be along to check on you both in a few minutes." Obito just nodded and left without so much as a word but Kakashi hesitated. Minato shooed him with his hands. Kakashi glanced at Otsuka, Minato and Jiraiya and back again before finally leaving the room.

Minato slipped into the seat next to Otsuka's, hand brushing over the top of her head before he crossed his arms and gave Jiraiya a cold smile. "So sensei, want to tell me what I missed?"

Jiraiya laughed awkwardly, slowly moving towards the door. "Hah, Minato I don't know what you're talking about! I-"

“It’s alright Minato.” Otsuka surprised them both as she spoke up. Minato glanced over at her and his mood lightened as he met her soft gaze. “He was just leaving. Weren’t you Jiraiya? I’m pretty sure you had to break the news to Orochimaru-san and Tsunade-san.”

“Y-yeah! See you Minato! Otsuka!” Jiraiya made a break for the door and was gone within seconds.

There was a long silence before Minato said something. “So?”

Otsuka sighed as she leaned into Minato. “I think he was trying to goad me into something. He wanted to invite the rest of his team over tomorrow, and when I refused multiple times he tried to rile me up by telling me it wasn’t really my house, along with implying you would undermine me.”

“Otsuka I would nev-”

“I know.” She looked up at him and took his face in her hands. “Don’t worry. If he tries it again I’ll kick his ass to the curb.” She pinched his cheeks.

“God I can’t believe he- Ow! Otsukaaa!” Otsuka laughed as she let go of Minato’s cheeks.

“Sorry, sorry. It’s stress relieving.” She kissed him, hard.

Minato lifted her from her seat onto his lap, sighing into the kiss. Otsuka's fingers dug into his shirt, pulling him even closer to her than before. He slid his tongue into her mouth, savoring the taste of tea that lingered on her lips. He let her kiss him senseless until she finally ran out of air. Otsuka pulled away, her stomach tingling pleasantly. Minato’s face was flushed and he looked a little frazzled.

“Thank you. For always being on my side.”

Minato rested his head on her shoulder, snuggling in close to her neck he hummed. “Of course. We’re a team.”

~

Minato didn’t even bother giving Jiraiya a warning as he hirashined right to the seal he’d placed on his teacher. He appeared in the middle

of Tsunade's backyard, finding his sensei talking with Tsunade on a bench. "Tsunade." Minato gave the woman a genuine smile before he turned his gaze on Jiraiya. "Sensei." He growled out.

"Minato! Tsunade and I were just-"

"Nope! This is your mess Jiriaya, I want no part in it." Tsunade snatched the sake bottle off the bench and waved to Minato as she left. "Beat his ass Minato!"

"Ah-ah, uh Minato you know how much I-" Jiraiya shifted in his seat nervously.

"You're going to tell me why you were trying to give Otsuka a panic attack. Then after that you're going to go back and apologize, and then you're going to pack up your things and find another place to sleep while you're in town." Minato didn't move as he stared down at him.

Jiraiya finally dropped the act enough to consider his student before sighing. "Don't you find it suspicious that she's been involved in all of the recent incidents across Konoha. I mean she's a civilian for heaven's sake, and no one is questioning putting her in charge of vulnerable shinobi."

"So you don't trust her. Sensei, Otsuka is Shikaku's cousin. You knew her mother, do you really believe she's what, a sleeper agent? A plant?" Minato's words had a biting tone under them. He wasn't quite sure what to think about his teacher's suspicion of his new fiance. Still the way he had acted earlier this evening was unacceptable.

"Yes! Think about it Minato! It's too hard for you or Shikaku to see because you're both too invested but-"

"And is Inoichi or Hokage-sama too invested? They both deemed trusting her with that position was the best option." Minato sighed as he ran a hand through his hair. Frustration was building alongside his anger. Was it too much to ask the two most important people in his life to get along? "And she's hardly done anything that will hurt the village."

"She's manipulative! You just can't see it yet!"

"And you aren't?" Minato raises a critical eyebrow.

"It's a shinboi's job to manipulate others! She's supposed to be a

civilian."

"Otsuka has never been a civilian. She may not have developed her chakra but we both know how her mother has changed her. Honestly sensei I don't understand what is up with you!" Minato didn't quite snap, he just sort of let go. Because Jiraiya had never been kind to Otsuka but he hadn't ever provoked her. Minato had originally chalked it up to Jiraiya just being awkward around a woman he couldn't flirt with and that it would all smooth over eventually. But it had only escalated.

Minato reached up to mess with the braid in his hair. Tugging on it as he tried to channel Otsuka. She would know what to do, what to say to get Jiraiya to tell him what was going on. But he wasn't Otuska, he was Minato. And he would have to be enough. Minato gives his sensei a weak smile. "What aren't you telling me Sensei?"

Jiraiya didn't respond. He looked everywhere but at Minato, like he was trying to think of the best way to escape.

"Sensei please."

"Minato I-" Jiraiya choked on his own words. "She's, there's nothing wrong with her really I just dont want to-" He stopped himself again.

"Don't want to?" Minato prompted as he sat himself down next to his teacher.

"I don't want to lose you." It was so quiet Minato almost didn't hear it. His anger completely fell away as it dawned on him that Jiraiya relied on Minato as much as he did his teacher. He reached out and wrapped his arms around the older man tightly.

"No," Minato wondered when the last time he'd hugged his teacher was. "I'd never let that happen. I will always be your student and you will always be my teacher. You're-" The words caught in Minato's throat.

Jiraiya's eyes were wide in understanding. "Thank you Minato." Jiraiya tried to turn away to hide the tears but Minato shook his head and stopped him.

"No, no I need to say it outloud. Because I never say it, but you need to know. You're like a father to me, Sensei. And I love you." Minato gave him a teary smile and then pulled the man back into the tight hug. They stayed that way for a few seconds before Minato cleared his

throat and pulled away. It had been a long day and he knew Sensei would only be able to handle so much confrontation.

“Now!” Minato clapped his hands together, standing up. “I believe you have an apology to make and you better get a move on so none of the hotels close before you can find a room.”

“You were serious about that?”

Minato smiled at Jiraiya. “Yes.Try to manipulate my fiance into a panic attack again Sensei, and you’ll never be welcome in my house again. Now get to it Sensei, you’re burning daylight.”

~

Otsuka sighed as she relaxed into her chair. Minato glanced over at her and smiled. “Are you okay? Too much yet?” He reached up to caress her cheek and pressed a kiss into her forehead.

“No, just so many people to greet.” She turns to him, and adjusts her kimono so it doesn't snag on the table. She beams at him, feeling like she’s flying as her stomach flips. “I love you Minato, I love you so so much.”

Minato blushed but didn’t back down from his newly made wife. “I love you too.” He kisses her softly, breathing her in before he pulls away. “I can’t believe you’re finally my wife!”

“I can’t either!”

“You can’t believe I’m finally your wife?” Minato asks, smile spreading even further across his face.

“And what a beautiful wife I have too. Such soft hair.” Otsuka grins and tugs on both of the longer strands of Minato’s hair.

He laughs and tackle hugs her, sending them both toppling over onto the table and into the large wedding cake that was waiting for them to cut it. There was an audible gasp as the cake splattered all over Otsuka’s wedding kimono and Minato’s own suit. Minato didn’t stop laughing as he rolled off of Otsuka, and laid beside her instead. Otsuka choked on her own laughter as she laid on the ground in the

ruins of what had been their five tiered cake.

“Otsuka! Oh my god are you okay?!” Mikoto appears in Otsuka’s vision, horror written across her face. It’s all Otsuka can do to wave her off and try to convey that Otsuka has in fact never been better. It’s Minato who recovers first, flipping onto his stomach, propping himself up on his elbows and resting his head in his hands.

“Well, we cut the cake.” And that sent Otsuka into another fit of laughter. She blindly grabs a fistfull of cake and smashes it into Minato’s face, smearing it into his hair too. He glares at her but he was still smiling as he wiped his own frosting covered fingers down the side of her face.

“Minato not the cake!” Jiraiya groans. Minato grins cheekily up at his sensei from his place on the floor. He’d made him pay for the cake as further retribution for his actions, and Jiraiya was beginning to believe Minato was never going to stop making him pay for it.

“Kakashi, do you want any cake?” Minato asked, looking over to the side where his student was burning red, mortified. Minato may have been purposely trying to make it worse when he licked the frosting off his fingers and hummed. “It’s really quite good.”

“S-sensei!!” Pakkun hopped out of Kakashi’s lap and trotted over, licking the cake off Otsuka’s hand when she offered it up to him.

Mikoto sighed and Kushina appeared behind her, grinning. “Hey what if I wanted some?”

“Well it’s our wedding cake, I rather think we get to decide just what we do with it.” Minato ignored Jiraiya’s muttering of ‘ *well you didn’t pay for it’* and opted to focus back on Otsuka instead.

“I rather think you should have consulted me before you threw me into it.” Otsuka says, resting her chin on Minato’s cake covered shoulder. Minato winced.

“Sorry I wasn’t-” He stopped when she offered him a huge piece of cake, eyes flickering from the piece of cake to her target. Minato leaned over for a chaste kiss, scooping the cake out of her hand, and then launched it directly into Fugaku’s face.

The food fight, as it turned out, was maybe Otsuka’s favorite part of her wedding.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure I love this chapter but the beauty of editing is that once I'm finished with the story I can come back and change it. The next chapter is the major time skip and we get back to Danzo shenanigans and we have a baby Naruto in our future..... EEEEEEEEE I'm so excited for baby Naruto!!!

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

And finally we have the time skip. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For reference it's early March

Kakashi & Obito are 12

Minato is now 30 and Otsuka is 29

~ 6 Years Later ~

Minato snuck up behind Otsuka, expecting to scare her out of her wits. He'd dropped by her office unannounced and asked Mebuki to not say anything. It was rather mean of him to try to scare his wife but maybe it could be stress relieving? It would be for him at least.

"Minato, are you going to just keep standing there the whole day?" Minato jumped, startled, because he was sure she hadn't seen him. Otsuka snapped the file in front of her closed, and calmly shoved it under a book before he could see. She was getting better and better at the slight of hand tricks Kakashi had taught her.

"How did you know I was there?" He pouted, falling dramatically across her desk, sending the pile of books and files flying off her desk. She glared at him.

"Mebuki has a button for when someone comes in too quickly for her to call me." Minato groaned.

"I thought she was on my side!"

"Well you're not her boss." Otsuka smiled, leaning down to kiss Minato's temple and then opened the door. "Mebuki, can you get me Minato's file?" The woman smiled at her and nodded.

"My file?" Minato asked, confused. He sat up and then sighed as he realized he should clean up the mess he made. Otsuka wouldn't say it but he knew if she knelt for too long the pain would start to flair. He

was careful not to look at any of the papers. Otsuka always knew, and he was smart enough not to do one of the few things that would actually make her angry.

Otsuka shrugged as she turned back around. “Hokage-sama asked me to give you a psych-eval.”

Minato raised an eyebrow at that. “Isn’t that a conflict of interest?” He studied Otsuka, concerned. Usually she would be up in arms about something like this, she was always firm that she could not be his counselor and that he needed to seek help outside of her.

“Yes but he was insistent that I do it. I went to Kin but he was sure it needed to be me.” Minato was really shocked at that, because between Kin, Otsuka, and Inoichi, Kin was even stricter about patient confidentiality. Which was impressive because Otsuka would murder someone in order to ensure her patients records were kept out of the wrong hands.

A very pregnant Mebuki appeared at the door and handed Otsuka Minato’s file. “Sorry to spoil the surprise Minato-san.” Mebuki was smiling at him but Minato was sure she didn’t look sorry at all.

“It’s fine.” Minato gave her a closed eyes smile, and placed the last of the files on top of Otsuka’s desk.

Otsuka closed the door, lighting up the privacy seal that she had come up with herself. Minato was proud to have a family of fuinjutsu users. She opened the file and paused, eyes narrowing before a grin broke out across her face. “Well that makes a lot more sense. Seems Kin was right.”

Minato moved to look at what it said but she turned away before he could. “I can’t see my own file?”

Otsuka shook her head. “Nope!” She smiled at him and Minato was feeling a little like maybe his wife was an imposter. “Now, let’s get started. Go sit in the chair.”

“Otsuka-” Minato stopped when she met his eyes.

“I promise it’s nothing to worry about. Besides, every shinobi will be going through mandatory psych-eval once the war is officially over and based on-" Otsuka hesitated. “Well I can’t tell you but really don’t worry too much.”

Minato sighed but noticed that she hadn't actually really read his file and- Oh that was why she wasn't upset. She hadn't even really read much of his file. His wife was so smart. "Okay, I trust you." Minato relaxed into the chair and prepared himself for the questions.

"First things first, why don't you tell me a little about your students?"

"But you know them already."

Otsuka rolled her eyes. "Entertain me."

So Minato talked about his students, his thoughts on the ending of the war, how he felt his relationship with his wife was going, his concern for Kushina, his concern for how integrating a new student into his team might upset Kakashi, and many other things. He was a little surprised at how thorough Otsuka was, but he didn't mind. She never asked a question about something he hadn't already shared with her.

They finished up with a few questions about how he viewed his own skill and then Otsuka was up and stretching. "Well that's that!" Minato blinked when he looked out the window and found the sun was already setting. How long had that taken? That was definitely not normal for a psych-eval.

"Otsuka why did-"

"Minato, I think that hawk is for you." Otsuka pointed out the window. Minato followed her line of sight and nodded.

"Shit I hope it hasn't been circling for long." Minato pulled Otsuka into a kiss and then was gone before she could even say goodbye. She laughed, sighing as she looked back out into the window. He really had no idea did he.

She stepped out of her office to find Kin headed down the hallway to her. "How'd it go?" He asked.

"He had no idea. Honestly you would think that my husband was smart enough to figure out when he's being considered as a Hokage candidate. And thanks for the heads up by the way." Otsuka waved the note Kin had left in Minato's file.

Kin smiled. "What can I say, I wasn't going to let Minato fail." Otsuka rolled her eyes.

"As if anyone else would have failed him."

Kins face darkened a little. “You never know who Danzo has bribed.” Otsuka glared at him.

“Imply one of my employee’s is capable of being bought again, Kin and I will tell Mebuki to start filing paperwork under your name.” Kin winced, because he knew Otsuka had twice the paperwork he did and he certainly didn’t need anymore.

“It was more because I didn’t want our future Hokage to bare his soul to anyone else.” He made a face as he tried to back pedal. Kin liked his free time. Minato needed two separate psych-evals from psychologists from different departments in order to be considered for Hokage. Kin was fairly certain Minato would be even more honest with Otsuka than he was with Kin who was his current counselor.

“So the Hokage’s going to tell him right now?” Kin nodded.

“How does it feel, Otsuka-hime?” Otsuka sighed and half-heartedly swung at Kin.

“Please don’t start calling me that.” Kin patted her on the shoulder but wasn’t feeling sympathetic at all. “But back to what you said, do you have proof to back up what your claim?”

Kin shifted, wondering if this was really the best time or place to have brought this up with Otsuka. “Just suspicions. I’ll tell you more later. Give me a few weeks to dig up some more information.”

“Okay, let me know.” What Kin didn’t know was that Minato’s plan was already almost ready. Kushina had said that the seal was nearing enough power to put to use, and with Minato becoming Hokage, using the seal would be simple and sentencing him with proof would be a very real possibility. But there remained a single problem which was once Danzo was taken out, they would have no idea who was root and who wasn’t, and what deals Danzo had made.

Otsuka was home before Minato was, so she decided to buy dinner. Kushina, who had been making dinner for everyone for years, was staying with Mikoto until her pregnancy was over. After the scare last week when Mikoto had fainted Kushina and Otsuka had agreed to make sure they took care of all of Mikoto’s needs.

As it had turned out Mikoto was having twins, but the chakra toll was extreme. She needed to be on bedrest now, and Kushina had moved into Mikoto’s house overnight. Otsuka had been declared god mother of both children as had Kushina, Fugaku had protested but Mikoto had

declared her children would simply have two godmothers instead of a godmother and a godfather.

In fact Otsuka and Minato had been collecting pseudo-children this year. Little Neji had been born only a few months ago and Hizashi had declared Minato his godfather. Yoshino had just announced she was expecting and both Minato and Otsuka had been declared the child's godparents. Mebuki had asked Otsuka to be godparent to her own child who was coming within the two weeks.

Minato was going to be assigned a new student next week, which Otsuka just knew was going to mean there would be another preteen running around the house. Then there was Gai, who Minato and Otsuka were close to convincing to move into the house. His grandfather had finally passed away a few months ago and ever since Minato had been doing everything in his power to take Gai under his wing.

And finally there was little Shisui. Mikoto's brother had only died last yearing leaving the young boy all alone, Mikoto had taken him in but Minato had taken to the boy like a fish to water. Shisui had been following Minato around for months now, to the point he might as well have been living in their house too.

"I'm home!" Otsuka called out, slipping her coat off and kicking her shoes into the pile at the side of the door.

"Youthful Oba-san!" Gai came bursting out of the sun room's door and was waving. He hadn't stopped calling her that since she'd first offered. "Welcome home!"

Otsuka smiled and hugged the young boy tightly. He seemed more like himself than he had in a while. And then Kakashi came out with every one of his summons and it made a little more sense. His pack of ninken were probably the best emotional support in the world. Otsuka knew from experience.

Pakkun and Shiba trotted over to say hi, and Otsuka squatted to give them both some love. All eight of Kakashi's ninken were possibly the sweetest beings she'd ever met.

"Agk!" Obito jumped onto Kakashi's back, grinning.

"Obito!" Kakashi groaned but didn't do much to shake him off. Otsuka sometimes wondered how Obito got away with teasing Kakashi more than Minato, Gai, and herself did, combined.

“Obito, Kakashi. Minato won’t be home for probably at least another hour. What do you all say to takeout?”

“CAN WE PLEASE HAVE TAKOYAKI! PLEASE! PLEASE!” Obito was waving from on top of Kakashi’s back until Kakashi released his hold on Obito and let him drop. “OWWWW! BAKASHI!” Obito howled. Otsuka just rolled her eyes at her boys.

“Kakashi? Gai?”

“We can get Takoyaki from Tsubi’s!” Gai exclaimed. “What youthful food!”

“Sure, whatever works.” Kakashi shrugged, and looked away from Otsuka. He’d been doing that more and more lately. The whole nonchalant moody attitude. The joys of having three pre-teens in the house were lost on Otsuka. She feared for when Gai gained his own team and Kakashi and Obito got their new teammate. Hopefully Hokage-sama would have pity on her.

“Tsubi’s then, why don’t the three of you go bring back food. I’ll take some Chicken Katsu, and get Udon for Minato” Otsuka took her wallet out of her pocket and handed it over to Gai, who was the most trustworthy with money of the three.

“Kaa-san, do I have to go with them?” Kakashi looked at her with puppy eyes. But that didn’t work on her anymore, mostly. She glanced away from her pushing down the anxiety that came whenever she actually told any of her children no or denied them a request.

“Yes. Now off you go.” Otsuka shooed them out the door and then headed down stairs to the library. She was still in there when Minato came home twenty minutes later. He flung the door to the library open, scaring her.

“You knew!” He accused, but his eyes were filled with excitement and he couldn’t keep the frown on his face.

Otsuka squeaked in surprise before she turned to her husband. She smirked up at him. “I may have had my suspicions.” She wiggled her eyebrows and Minato came further into the room scooping her up in his arms. He swung her around and lifted her above his head.

“I’m going to be Hokage!” He slowed down the spinning and held her closer as he came to a stop. “I’m going to be Hokage.” He said it softer this time but his voice was filled with wonder and awe.

Otsuka hugged him back, practically vibrating in her own excitement. He had been working for this for months. “I know! I’m so happy for you Minato, you did it!”

“I did.” He replied, burying his head into her neck. He breathed her in as he reveled in the feeling. This was it. He had finally arrived at what had been his goal for years, and it felt amazing.

The loud chattering of Obito carried from the front of the house down into the library as the three kids arrived back. Otsuka pulled away. “Are you going to tell them?”

Minato sniffed. “No, I think I’ll keep it a surprise for now.” Otsuka laughed. Obito would be jealous Minato had beaten him to the hat.

~

Shisui had come over to wait for Minato to come home with Kakashi, Obito and Rin, their new teammates. Otsuka had not expected the meeting to go badly at all, and if it had she trusted Minato to step in and be able to defuse the situation. She had thought that everything would go fine, and all of them could go out to Ichiraku’s tonight for dinner.

That was not at all what happened.

Shisui was only four, but he was smart and socially adept. In fact Otsuka had met many young geniuses in her life, and none of them had been quite as socially smart as Shisui was. Otsuka was almost certain that when the little boy had left Mikoto’s house knowing that if he showed up alone she was less likely to send him home.

If Kushina and Mikoto were busy enough they had missed him leaving it was better he stay the night anyways. Besides, Shisui made for a great cuddle buddy. Minato and Otsuka now had a bed big enough that there could be another four people sleeping in it and she still wouldn’t kick Minato out of the bed. So Otsuka had let him stay, and was looking forward to meeting and dining with the newest member of her family.

Instead what Otsuka got was Obito bursting through the door and running past her and Shisui and up the steps. She heard the door to

his room slam and then Kakashi appeared at the doorway looking a mix between distraught and angry.

“Kakashi?” Otsuka half stood up from her place on the floor. Kakashi took one look at her concerned face and then ran out of the house. What on earth?

“Is Kakashi okay?” Shisui asked as Otsuka scooped him up from the floor. He wrapped his small hands around her neck.

“I’m not sure.” The toddler frowned but didn’t ask anything else. Otsuka looked between the direction Obito had gone and the direction Kakashi had gone. She was sure she had seen tears in Obito’s eyes but Kakashi had left the house and the last time she’d lost track of Kakashi he’d been-. She cut that thought off as her anxiety spiked. If she thought about it more she’d have a panic attack.

She took a deep breath, holding Shisui a little tighter as she assessed the situation. Obito was safe and sound at home, and Kakashi had gone who knows where. If Kakashi was trying to hide she wouldn’t be able to find him, so instead she needed to find Minato.

Minato, as if summoned by her thoughts, stepped through the open doorway, carrying a young girl who was hiccuping in his arms. She looked about 12 and Otsuka was sure this must be their new teammate. She gave Minato a concerned look and he just shook his head at her.

She frowned. Someone needed to go after Kakashi. She looked at Shisui and squared her shoulders. “Kakashi ran out of the house. I don’t know where he went.” She spoke into the silence.

The girl in Minato’s arms froze and then started to shake a little more. She felt bad for reminding the girl but Kakashi was only 12 and Minato would be able to find him with little effort. Minato still gave her a helpless look.

“Minato,” She softened her tone. “Please go find Kakashi, I can take care of-” She looked at the girl.

“Rin.” Minato supplied. The lack of a last name told her all she needed to know about the girl’s parents. Otsuka walked closer, shifting Shisui to the other arm so Rin would be able to see the adorable toddler in her arms.

He waved at her and Otsuka gave the girl a warm smile. She was

adorable. “Hi Rin-chan, I’m Otsuka Namikaze, it’s nice to meet you. Do you like cookies? Or tea?”

“Otsuka-oba makes yummy cookies!” Shisui added very seriously. Rin giggled and hiccupped at the same time.

“Cookie’s sound good Otsuka-san.”

“Oh none of that. Otsuka is just fine.” Minato set Rin down and gave her a quick hug.

“I’ll be right back Rin.” He shared a look with Otsuka that told her he’d find Kakashi and that she could stop worrying about what might happen to him while he was running around at night unsupervised. Minato gave Rin a smile before he was out the door, closing it behind him.

Otsuka smiled down at Rin and led her into the Kitchen and sat Shisui down in the seat next to Rin at the island. She warmed up the leftover tea she had made earlier this afternoon with a seal and then set down a plate of cookie’s she’d made this morning in front of Shisui and Rin.

She poured them both Tea and tried to pretend she wasn’t about to leave keeping Rin calm to Shisui while she went to talk to Obito. She smiled at Shisui and when he winked at her Otuska knew that the toddler had caught on to her plan. This didn’t make her a bad parent did it? She hoped not.

“Alright Rin, I’ll be right back okay? Just got to move the laundry over.” Otsuka waved at the two and then went up the stairs and walked right to Obito’s room. She couldn’t hear him crying so Otsuka knocked on the door.

“Go away Bakashi!”

“It’s Otsuka. Can we talk?”

“Do we have to?” Obito sounded so small that Otuska wanted nothing more than to hug him.

“Well, what about if you talk and I listen?” There was silence for a moment. Finally Obito opened up the door. His eyes looked red and irritated, and his room looked like he’d been throwing things about in anger.

“You can come in.” He said softly, going to sit on his bed. Otsuka

closed the door behind her, coming to sit next to Obito on the bed. The moment she did he hugged her fiercely, burying his head in her torso. She hugged him back, one hand stroking his hair soothingly.

They stayed like that for a while before finally Otsuka decided he's had enough comfort that she could ask him about what happened without upsetting him. "Do you wanna tell me about it?"

Obito shook his head, not even moving to look at her. She sighed and hugged him closer. Her stomach was twisting into knots with anxiety, she'd never seen Kakashi and Obito get into a fight like this. Or at least what she assumed was a fight.

Her best guess was that while they were meeting Kakashi had made a snide comment that went a little too far, had caused Rin to cry and then when Obito had demanded Kakashi apologize they'd gotten into an even bigger fight. But Kakashi was so prideful and moody lately he was unlikely to back down, and Obito was ruthless when it came to his friends. If he felt Kakashi had really wronged Rin then he wouldn't have given up fighting and then Kakashi would have retaliated if Obito said something that struck too close to home.

So maybe she *could* guess what had happened. She knew her boys well and she'd seen the animosity between Obito and Kakashi stewing and growing more and more as they struggled with their own emotions and puberty.

"Okay so what if I tell you a story instead?"

"What kind of story?" Obito looked up at her this time, tears still in his eyes.

"About Shikaku and I."

"Shikaku-oji and you?" And hadn't that been a hysterical moment when Shikaku had realized that every kid Minato and Otsuka ever adopted would become his nephew or niece. She was practically his sister and his parents had insisted she still come to the family dinners after she married Minato. Of course Minato hadn't been allowed to come, but Otsuka was seated next to Shikaku's mother. It was about as much of a parental claim as a Nara would ever make.

"Yep. Do you wanna hear it?"

"Well yeah, you never talk about when you were younger Kaa-san." Otsuka smiled at the name. Obito wouldn't call her Kaa-san often, she

suspected it was because he worried about making Kakashi jealous, but when he did it made her heart leap.

“Hm, I suppose I don't. Well you know how we have big family dinners once a month? One night, a long time ago, I decided to speak up during the discussion, well my uncle asked me directly actually. Because we were so young, to be asked a question was a big thing. They asked about homeschooling, and I agreed with it pretty instantly. But Shikaku shot me down in front of the whole family. He essentially said I was stupid and wasn’t considering the repurcutions.” Otsuka adjusted her hold on Obito so he could relax into her as she told the story.

“He said you were stupid?!” Obito looked at her shocked and Otsuka just nodded.

“Well I think his words were ‘if you want to bring the village to civil war, staying home would be the best choice’ or something along those lines. Either way, I ran out crying because I felt so embarrassed. I felt like Shikaku had shown the whole clan how stupid I really was. I was never very good at strategy games or very book smart so I always thought I was stupid. I thought because I was only half Nara it would only be a short amount of time until I was kicked out for being stupid.”

“Really? I don’t think you’re stupid at all.”

Otsuka laughed. “Thank you Obito. I don’t think I’m stupid either.” And Otsuka didn’t realize til the words came out of her mouth that the idea that she was stupid even still bothered her. She paused, shocked at her own discovery. It felt good, really really good to feel smart. She let out a half sigh, half sob of relief. Tears spilling down her cheeks.

“You’re crying!” Obito jumped up, wiping away her tears as he looked at her in horror. Otsuka just gave Obito a big smile.

“Thank you Obito.” She yanked him into a hug before she threw him onto the bed and started tickling him. He huffed out air and then squealed as he tried to escape from her reign of terror.

“HeyyyYYYyYyyY! STOoop!” Obito squirmed out of her hold and glared at her from the end of the bed.

She laughed at him before putting on a serious face. “Sorry sorry, I just realized something. Anyways, back to the story.” Otsuka cleared her throat. “Where was I?

“You ran out of the family dinner.” Obito provided, sliding back over to rest on her again, but slowly enough that he could escape if she tried to tickle him again.

“Ah yes, well afterwards Shikaku came back after me to apologize, and when we talked he told me something. He said ‘Every Nara is broken, and you’re the only one who isn’t.’ I still don’t understand what he meant by that, but it made me feel special.” Otsuka turned to the pre-teen seated next to her. Cupping Obito’s cheeks in her hands, Otsuka continued. “You’re special Obito, and I know sometimes the people who you love you say things to make you feel the opposite, but it doesn’t take away from the fact that you’re special. Never forget that.”

Obito stared at her for a moment before he looked away and mumbled out, “He said Rin-chan would only hinder the team and that we should have just stayed a team of two. He made her cry, so I tried to get him to apologize but he just got upset. And then he said that if I was going to weigh the team down too then he and Sensei didn’t need me either.” Obito shoved his hands under his arms and sighed.

Otsuka hugged him again and then kissed the top of his head. “I’m proud of you Obito, for standing up for Rin. What Kakashi said was wrong, and while I don’t think he meant it, that doesn’t make it okay. Now, Rin and Shisui are downstairs eating cookies and drinking tea, do you wanna join them? Or we can stay up here, whatever you wanna do.”

Obito frowned as he thought about it before he stood. “I haven’t seen Shisui in a week, I have to annoy my little cousin! And I want to make sure Rin feels better.” Otsuka gave Obito a huge smile.

“You kiddo, are amazing.” She pushed herself off the bed and the two went downstairs to find Shisui and Rin playing games. They had saved cookies for Obito and then Otsuka offered to make dinner while the three kept playing.

To repay Shisui she made his favorite, Yakitori. She watched the clock like a hawk as she waited for Minato and Kakashi to come home. Gai ended up beating them both, returned from his own team selection and proceeded to tell them all about Genma, Aoba, and Choza.

By the time Otsuka had finished up dinner and everyone had eaten, Otsuka had begun to get worried. She was doing the dishes when the door opened to reveal an exhausted Minato with a sullen looking

Kakashi following behind him. Otsuka almost collapsed in relief, and Minato was behind her supporting her in a second.

But no one else in the room seemed to have noticed her fumble. All eyes were on Kakashi as he walked up to Obito and Rin. He stood there for a while before he spoke. “I’m sorry Obito. You’re not worthless.” Otsuka blinked, that was not what Obito had told her. Maybe she shouldn’t have been surprised that Obito would’ve toned down what Kakashi had said. “Sorry Rin, I should’ve given you a chance.”

Kakashi looked away, his posture exuding uncomfortable and every fiber of his being screamed at him to run.

“I forgive you Kakashi.” Rin spoke up first. “Thank you for the apology, I hope we can be good friends!” She smiled at him.

Obito turned to Kakashi and smiled at him too. “Don’t worry Kakashi, I already know you’re all prickly, so I’ll just have to un-prick you so you can learn how to be more friendly.” Well it was one way to accept an apology.

Kakashi stared at Obito for a second before he turned on his heel and stocked up the steps. It was silent for a few more moments before Shisui screamed, “NATO!” and bull rushed Minato. Otsuka smiled. Shisui would make an amazing diplomat.

~

It did not take Minato long to convince Rin to start staying at the house and Otsuka was beginning to wonder if they would actually run out of rooms. They still had plenty of space but once Minato was Hokage, Otsuka expected to be housing an ANBU guard in the house, and if they actually had children, like they’d been talking about for the past few months…. Minato would figure it out.

After all, they could always expand the basement and there was plenty of backyard space for a guest house. Rin chose the last room that was on the top floor, next to where Minato’s office was and across from Kushina’s room.

Kakashi was still distancing himself from the entire household but

Otsuka found that anytime she started to worry about it Gai had already gotten Kakashi out of his room and was either training or competing with him. He was a good friend.

The weekend had gone much better after the initial first meeting of Team Minato, and Minato had decided to bring Ichiraku back to the house as their first official team dinner. Obito had set the dining room table, and made an attempt at making dessert with Kakashi. It had almost ended in a fire but Kakashi had been able to tell something was burning in time to save both the desert and the house.

Otsuka hadn't said anything about the smell of smoke when she came home from picking up the present for the team, but the guilty look on Obito's face had said enough for the both of them. When Minato finally arrived home, hands filled with ramen, dinner could finally begin.

"So Mebuki will be taking her leave tomorrow then?" Otsuka nodded.

"Yeah, I'll have quite a bit of work to do but she's expecting her little one in another two or three weeks and I wanna make sure she's off her feet. I tried to get her to stop working last month but she was insistent she stay as long as she could. I put my foot down, finally." Otsuka was still on her first and only bowl of ramen unlike everyone else at the table.

"Hm." Minato looked over at the children as he furrowed his brow.

"Something the matter?" Otsuka asked, concerned. Minato shook his head and gave her a smile.

"No, actually I think I just figured out a perfect solution to a problem. We'll talk about it later." He smiled at her and Otsuka nodded at him, but rolled her eyes when he snatched the egg out of her bowl.

"So, Rin-chan, how is your room? Let me know if you need any more furniture or other items, I want to make sure you're comfortable."

Rin shook her head, shyly. "No, I'm alright Otsuka. You've already given me more than enough."

Otsuka smiled at the young girl. She understood how easy it was to feel like a burden when people began to pay for everything for you. She'd felt the same way when Minato had started dumping gift after gift into her lap, and then when he'd bought the house she'd felt bad that she couldn't afford to help pay for it.

Money was a tricky business. Otsuka had begun making more than enough money to support herself and her family after another year of working her ass off to finally become director of the PWI, The Psychological Welfare Institution. That had been Mebuki's idea and Otsuka thought it was unassuming enough to convince Shinobi they wouldn't be interrogated but sounded official enough to get them in the door for their appointment.

But Minato had been willing, and insisted on paying for almost everything, so Otsuka set a certain amount of money aside each month for savings for the entire household, set some of it aside in a fund for Kakashi and one for Obito, a small portion of it went to an allowance and the rest went back into her department.

More recently however, Otsuka had considered that maybe she should start using the money to pay for something else. It would help Konoha if she could put the money to better use by spreading it out. Her department had grown into 30 counselors she and Kin had trained themselves and 10 specialists who would consult for PWI, T&I, and the hospital. They had gotten more funding from the Hokage two years ago and she felt her division would be fine if she started putting the money elsewhere.

"Well let me know." It occurred to Otsuka that maybe the orphanage would be the best place to start. They had large numbers, because Konoha had been at war for almost eight years now, and she knew that some of the orphanages outside of Konoha had begun to fill up too.

"Oh hey, did Genma find a place yet?" Obito asked out of the blue.

"Genma?" Minato asked.

"He's one of Gai's teammates." Kakashi supplied.

Rin shook her head. "The apartments nearby the orphanage are all too expensive for him. He wants to stay close by so he can help Rika-san with the new kids. After last year none of them don't want to join the program so the orphanage has been filling up faster and faster."

Something about what Rin had said rang a distant bell in Otsuka's head.

"Well he's welcome to stay here." Minato spoke up, smiling at Rin. And Otsuka was too lost in thought to realize her husband had just signed her up to take care of yet another child, not that she really

would have minded. “We are fairly close to the Orphanage, and the academy as well.”

Rin blushed. “Oh, I’ll ask him. Thank you very much Sensei. Does that mean you wouldn’t mind if I-”

“Rin.” Otsuka called, her face looked stricken even though her voice was as hard as nails. “What program are you talking about?”

“Oh, the orphanage has a sponsorship program that will help any kid who wants to become a ninja fast track through the academy so they can become independent faster. Most of the kids who end up in the orphanage had Shinobi parents so they want to follow in their footsteps. And well, many of them hate the orphanage so they’d do anything to leave.”

Otsuka felt like she was going to throw up.

Minato was staring at Otsuka in blatant concern as he called out to his wife. “Otsuka? Many clans sponsor young orphans to help them into the academy. I was sponsored by the Nara, you should know this…” Minato was uncertain of why his wife looked so deathly pale but he moved around the table to check on her. His hand fell on her shoulder and she startled out of her state.

“Sorry, I knew that I just got a little confused is all.” She smiled at the children at the table, hand reaching up to squeeze the life out of the hand Minato had put on her shoulder. The moment she started squeezing Minato knelt down to kiss her temple.

He gave her a worried look but didn’t press her. She would tell him later anyways, but right now she desperately wanted to find Kin.

It had clicked for her once Rin said it. Years ago, when Danzo had first approached her and Kakashi, he'd mentioned a program. One that would fast track Kakashi onto the path of a shinobi. And Kin had told her on thursday he had his suspicions that Danzo was bribing her employees. Why would Danzo need to bribe her employees any more, if it had been concluded that the war was ending for the past few months. Psych-evals would be put off for many ninja while the war came to an end, so Konoha would still have the full power of its army while they came to treaty agreements.

Danzo really had nevered cared for the mental health of Konoha’s shinobi. He cared about power. But Otsuka watched academy numbers, in order for an academy student to become a genin they

now had to pass a psych-eval. The law had been in place for the last four years and all of the evaluations passed across Otsuka's desk. As far as she was aware there hadn't been any large influx of children the last couple of years, in fact since the war had started the academy had less applicants. Civilian families were less likely to let their children join the academy, so it had been expected.

But if Rin was saying this academy program had been helping the orphanage free up space there should be records of the children going somewhere. Something was wrong, something was very very wrong and Otsuka needed to figure it out now.

Minato interrupted her line of thoughts when he pulled her to her feet and started leading her out of the dining room. "We'll be right back." He called, walking her into the Kitchen. He turned to her and gave her a questioning look.

Otsuka blinked a few times, staring at her husband. He was going to be Hokage soon, and she would have to be more careful about the matters she dug her hands into. If she got caught in a set up it would implicate her husband. She needed to know for certain before she told him anything, and the best place to start was with Kin.

"Something Rin said rang a bell. I'm not sure yet, but I think I need more information before I tell you." Otsuka looked anywhere but at Minato.

"Hey." His hands came to cup her face and he was giving her a soft look. "I trust you. Just keep me updated and if it gets dangerous you have to tell me." Otsuka could feel the concern he was trying to hide from her by the way his hands were shaking. She leaned into his touch and took a slow breath.

"I will. I promise I'll be careful, but if this is what I think it is I have to go talk to Kin right now, I know it's late but-"

"Go." Minato nodded. He pulled her into a quick hug and then let her go. "Be safe. Will you be back tonight?"

Otsuka frowned. "Probably not, but I'll be at the office. I'm sorry I know you were going to tell the kids tonight-"

"It's okay. Clearly it's important-" He paused, shifting his weight. "You know you can trust me right?" Otsuka kissed his cheek before she headed to grab her coat, it was still cold in late february.

“With everything. Come see me at the office if you can find the time tomorrow.” She waved at him and then she was gone.

Minato stared at the door for a few moments more before he shook off the terrible feeling that had come over him. His wife could handle herself, and if she hadn’t told him yet she was probably scheming something. It would be alright, it had to be. He turned around and headed back into the dining room.

“Sensei, are you really going to let another kid into the house?” Kakashi asked the moment the door opened, but his complaining was aimed more at Obito than Minato.

“GENMA IS OLDER THAN YOU BAKA-SHI.”

“So are you, and you’re more of a kid than I am.” Kakashi stuck his tongue out at Obito. Minato laughed, he would do anything for his kids.

Chapter End Notes

> I both love and hate this chapter. Tell me what you think, is it a bit of an overload on family? AlsoI thought it would be important to let you know this is the last chapter that this story will remain at a T-rating, and I've added descriptions of panic attacks as a warning to the entire story

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

A tiny bit of smut. You've been warned!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kin stared at Otsuka in shock as she finished explaining her theory. He couldn't decide if it was scarier that Otsuka had managed to figure this all out with such little information or if it was scarier that he believed every word she said.

"So who's our mole?"

Otsuka frowned. "I have no idea. I went over everyone in my head and none of them fit the description. But it's safe to assume that beyond the two of us, it could be anyone. So we have to set a trap, but how?"

"Otsuka if you're right about this they've been setting you up for years. They'll know you're setting a trap if you suddenly start changing your behavior."

Otsuka hummed, beginning to pace back and forth across the office. They'd come here when Otsuka had explained they needed absolute privacy. The privacy seals in Kin's office were the easiest to get to.

She had to catch the mole in the act. The easiest way to get the mole's attention was to go digging through the academy graduates files, but that was obvious and would just throw more suspicion on her. Instead she needed to have the mole come to her…..

Otsuka turned to face Kin. "I'll get a name from Rin. We falsify documents and leave it in the academy graduates section and then tag it so it tracks who touches it and where it goes."

"You can't touch the document then. Or know the name of the kid. You need to have plausible deniability. Otherwise they can just say you asked them to retrieve the document to pin the blame on them."

Otsuka nodded, coming to a stop and coming around to the other side of Kin's desk. "You get the name. I'll write up the documents and have Kushina do the tag for me, you fill in the name and any other personal information Rin gives you."

“Kushina has dual citizenship in Uzu and Konoha, involving her is a security risk. Why not have Minato do the seal?”

Otsuka shook her head, pulling on the edges of her shirt. “Anything that implicates me, implicates him. He’s going to be Hokage in the next couple of months. I want him as far away from this as possible. It’s convenient enough that I figured this out from Rin who just happened to be placed on Minato’s team while his other two students had graduated before the law.”

“You’re singing Kushina up for-”

Otsuka waves Kin off, pulling out empty paperwork from a drawer in his desk, fingers shaking. “Kushina has enough immunity to commit treason four times over.” She paused as she realized for the first time in a very long time she’d let information slip. The way Kin was looking at her told her he was thinking the same thing. “Forgive me, my anxiety is getting the best of me. Kushina will be fine.”

Kin gave Otsuka a weary smile as she ran a hand through her hair, breathing in deeply and willing herself to calm down slowly. “I’ll ask one of the matrons for a name and find Kushina. You get to work on the paperwork before everyone gets here. Doesn’t your temp start today?”

“Yeah. Her name is Veridian I think? She’s from T&I.”

Kin nodded. “I know her. Inoichi swears up and down by her. Don’t reveal anything but if Inoichi trusts her then it won’t be the end of the world if she finds out.”

“Are you going to tell your secretary?” Otsuka asked, hesitant.

Kin shook his head. “No, I doubt it’s them but…” He trailed off. The idea that someone they had been working with for years had betrayed them wasn’t pleasant. He stood and sighed. This was going to be a long day.

“I’ll move to my own office, come see me there.” Otsuka opened the door for Kin and headed for her own office. She had work to do.

~

Minato found Otsuka working furiously at her desk. There were bags under her eyes and Minato decided the coffee had been a good idea after all. She didn't even notice him slip in until he was placing the coffee on the desk in her view.

"Oh my god!" Otsuka threw herself forward to cover the papers she was working on, eyes darting up, and pure dread in her voice. She relaxed slightly when she realized it was Minato but didn't move from her awkward position on the desk.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you." Minato frowned down at her.

"It's alright. I asked Veridian to make sure I wasn't disturbed unless it was you or Kin." Slowly she began to shuffle the papers together, staying where she was until she could stash them under another stack of papers, ensuring Minato didn't even get a glimpse of what she was doing. His heart strained a little at the thought of her not trusting him, even if he knew that wasn't why she had done it.

Otsuka brightened when she saw the coffee and stood, coming around the desk to kiss her sweet, sweet husband. She revealed the feeling of Minato against her before she pulled away to sip at her coffee. She sighed as the warm caffeine slid down her throat like honey.

"I love you, so much."

"Me? Or the coffee?" Minato chuckled, doing his best to push past the concern and anxiety that had been waring within him since she had left suddenly last night. It had taken everything in him to stay away until finally, an hour before noon, he couldn't take it any more. Otsuka had never acted like this before and he wasn't quite sure how to handle it.

"You." Otsuka said it softly, staring up into his eyes. The sincerity of it allowed Minato a small reprieve from the near constant worry. He smiled.

"How's it going?" She groaned, resting her head on his chest.

"Slowly. Kin isn't back yet and it's been almost fourteen hours, and I am still struggling with these stupid documents." How did one fake the life of an entire child in one day? She had no idea.

"Can I help at all?" Otsuka took in a breath, glancing back and forth between where her papers were hidden and the obvious hurt in Minato's eyes. He couldn't touch the documents, and she didn't want

him involved in the situation at all but she could at least give him other work.

“Yes, as long as the Hokage doesn’t need you for anything.” Minato visibly straightened at her words of agreement. She smiled to herself at how happy he looked. She felt guilty for being so vague. They had shared everything the past few years. It felt wrong to suddenly start keeping secrets again.

“I’ll start shadowing him tomorrow, and Kakashi, Obito, and Rin have the day off.” Minato set his own coffee down, readying himself for work.

Otsuka held back a laugh and pointed at the bookcases lining her back wall. “Why don’t you start with organizing the books by section and then alphabetically first. Once you’re done with that I have some scrolls I want from the archives.”

Minato beamed at her and Otsuka couldn’t stop herself from laughing as he turned a determined gaze on the bookshelves. They were going down.

~

Shikaku wasn’t surprised by the knock on his office door, but he hadn’t expected to see Minato. He raised an eyebrow at the man as he handed him a piece of paper, looking expectant. Shikaku opened it and frowned.

Sorry for the inconvenience, Shikaku. Minato wants to help so I’m letting him help. I ran out of ideas for work so just give him a random document that no one will care I read and send him off like it’s all official. Thank you!

You’re the best,

Otsuka

Shikaku sighed and folded the paper closed again. “HIROTO!” The man appeared in the doorway a second later. “Get me a copy of

Report 23, Section 81, from this year please." Hiroto nodded and was off in a second. Shikaku stopped himself from sighing again as he looked at Minato's beaming face. Otsuka better pay him back for this. Looking after a whipped Minato was not a job he signed up for.

Otsuka dutifully did not laugh when she read the short note Shikaku gave her or when she unsealed the report about the prices the village paid for it's imported tomatoes this winter. She skimmed a few pages, nodding to herself, and then gave Minato a note to give to Inoichi.

Hours later The Hokage was grinning at Minato, who had shown up an entire hour later for their meeting this afternoon than he was supposed to. "It looks like you've had quite the eventful day Minato. I heard you've been all over the village running errands for your wife."

Minato smiled at Hiruzen. "Well someone had to." Shikaku rolled his eyes from his place on the couch.

"And can you explain exactly why Otsuka would need," Hiruzen referenced the list his ANBU had given him. After the first two hours of Minato flashing around the village some of the ANBU had gotten nervous enough to tell him their concerns. "Reports about tomato prices, the construction plans for new steps on the south east side, and a tax appeal for the academy district, to just name a few."

Minato shrugged but his smile widened. Shikaku groaned. "You knew, you bastard? And you didn't say anything!"

"What can I say, watching you all flounder to come up with something was funny." The Hokage started laughing and Shikaku swore.

"Well you certainly had the ANBU worried. Now let's get down to business. Minato, you will be accompanying me to Iwa next week as we negotiate for the treaty. After we finish I will go to Kumo while you go to Kiri to finish negotiating and sign the treaty."

Minato gawked. "But- Hokage-sama! I'm not the Hokage yet won't Kiri get upset that you aren't the one to sign it?"

Hiruzen smiled at Minato. "After Kiri's little stunt with Uzugakure last year I believe you will be the best person to deal with them. Your close friendship with Uzu's hime, Kushina will scare them off from attempting to ask for more than if it were I. Besides, I would like to hand over The Hat within the next few months."

"You're not going to ease me into the seat?" Minato asked, while the

last two Hokage changes had been sudden, Hiruzen had hinted at a slow transition when he had first brought it to Minato last week.

The Hokage smirked. “I think two months is rather slow, don’t you Shikaku?”

“He doesn’t want to deal with the influx of paperwork after the treaties are signed.” Shikaku fills in, finally standing to hand Minato the right file. Minato had selected Shikaku as his jonin commander right after Hiruzen had told him to pick one. As such Shikaku was now expected to join him in most of the future meetings Hiruzen and Minato would have as they planned for the future.

“Ah, well I will do my best Hokage-sama!” Minato grinned. He couldn’t believe his dream was finally coming true.

“Have you chosen the other members who you’d like on your council yet?” Shikaku asked, rifling through the notes he’d been taking.

“You’ll be replacing the council?” Hiruzen was surprised.

Minato nodded. “No offense Hokage-sama, but I think I would do better with people I have chosen.” The Hokage nodded thoughtfully but didn’t say anything else. Minato turned to Shikaku. “The only other person I’m sure about is Fugaku, I still have to ask him but I doubt he’ll refuse. Jiraiya-sensei won’t be in the village often enough.”

“Tsunade?” Hiruzen offered.

Minato sighed. “She might kill me if I asked, but as it is I only have two of the three members chosen.”

“Who’s the other one?”

“Otsuka.” Minato said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world. Hiruzen stopped, was the Hokage’s spouse allowed to be on the council? He doubted there were any rules specifically against it, and Otsuka had always been Minato’s greatest confidant.

“Well run the final member by me once you’ve decided. However you may need to give my old teammates,” He paused. “ *Special* , positions. Otherwise you’ll never get them out of their seats without a fight.”

Suddenly Minato grinned mischievously. “I got it!”

“Who?” Hiruzen asked suddenly, very, very concerned.

“Why you of course Hokage-sama!” The man groaned but didn’t argue. It was a smart decision even if he hated the idea of still having to attend any meetings at all. At least Biwako wouldn’t have to hold the Sarutobi Clan seat any more. She was constantly complaining about how early she had to wake up for the Clan head meetings.

~

Otsuka curled further into the warmth Minato’s bare skin offered her. It was early morning and she was exhausted but couldn’t seem to fall back asleep. Minato and his team would be leaving with The Hokage later this morning and the house would be empty for the first time in years.

Kushina was still with Mikoto and Gai was out on a training trip with his team. And while Genma was out with Gai he was still considering moving in. Being alone was scary. They’d be gone about a month if not a little bit more and Rin, Obito and Kakashi had only just become a team two weeks ago. Would they be okay? Would Otsuka be okay?

Considering the last time Otsuka had been left alone she’d found a job and adopted the cutest kid in the world it might not be all that bad. But lately the only thing that could pull Otsuka out of wondering what had happened to all those children was her family. Who were all about to leave the village. She sighed loudly, causing Minato to stir.

He blinked himself awake, yawning. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you. You have an early morning, go back to sleep.”

Minato shushed her, hands grasping her waist and reaching down “Minato!” Otsuka whisper-yelled at him, blushing furiously. He smirked at her and she shifted as his hands found what they were looking for.

“What can I say, I can’t get enough of you.” He brushed his lips up against her neck and she shivered. His touch always made her entire body tingle.

“Oh so the four orgasms weren’t enough for you?” She whispered, tangling her fingers in his hair. He furthered his attack on her neck as she groaned softly.

“Nope.” Minato’s hands worked a little harder to get sounds out of his wife. She arched her back as his fingers slipped in a little further and his mouth found her breast. Sofly nipping at her nipple, Minato coaxed a louder moan out of Otsuka. His thumb circled her clit, urging her forward.

“Minato.” Otsuka gasped, her nails digging into his shoulders when he bit her nipple, harder this time. She pulled him back up so she could kiss him. Biting his lip and slipping her tongue into his mouth as he pumped his fingers faster in an attempt to bring her closer to the edge. Otsuka’s legs spread for him as he maneuvered himself on top of her, still lip locked.

Minato pulled away as he readied himself. “Up for another round before breakfast?” He asked, his eyes drinking in the sigh of Otsuka sprawled out beneath him.

Otsuka looked up at him through her eyelashes, tangling one hand in his hair while the other grasped at him. Minato groaned and twisted her nipple in retaliation. Otsuka hissed, before beginning her ministrations and she delighted in the sound of Minato groaning again. “Definitely.”

~

Otsuka found herself on the floor of her kitchen. Sprawled out, enjoying the cool feeling of the tile under her. Last night had been her first night with an empty house and she had rather enjoyed it. Having the bed to herself was fun and she had been able to clean without everything turning into a mess again a few seconds later. But this morning had been a different story.

She had woken up to an empty bed, walked into an empty kitchen and realized she was in an empty house. It was then that the novelty of being alone at home had worn off, not even 24 hours later. She supposed that she could always go stay with Mikoto, but disturbing her best friend for an entire month was too much. Maybe she would go for dinner tonight though?

The knock on the door startled her. She twisted, checking to make sure the seal above the door wasn’t glowing. It wasn't; a friendly visitor then. She opened the door to reveal Kushina and Shisui.

Kushina pushed right on by her, carrying Shisui to the island counter and setting him on top of it.

“Delivery for Otsuka Namikaze!” Kushina was grinning from ear to ear as she watched Otsuka light up at the sight of Shisui. The woman closed the door before scooping Shisui up in her arms and cuddling him.

“Shisui! I missed you.” Otsuka sighed contentedly as Shisui wrapped his arms around her neck and almost instantly fell asleep. She glanced over at Kushina. “What brings you over? Actually I was just thinking about checking up on Mikoto after work today.”

Kushina relaxed into one of the chairs, appreciating the chance to sit. She had taken over almost all of Mikoto’s duties and it was exhausting. How did Mikoto do it? “Well Mikoto has been getting more tired with every day, Mikoto and I thought it would be best for Shisui-kun to stay with you until she has the babies.”

Otsuka smiled at her friend. “Thank you.” She hugged Shisui a little closer and sighed. “Well he can go to work with me today, should we come to dinner tonight? I can help Shisui pick up his things.”

Kushina nodded. “Mikoto will be excited to see you. And let poor Shisui-kun sleep. He was up all night helping me figure out how to plan this annual Uchiha festival.” The red-head groaned, massaging her temples.

“Do you need any help?” Otsuka swayed back and forth, rocking Shisui even if he didn’t need it.

“Oh please, Otsuka you’re so busy you always have steam coming out your ears. I can handle it. I just need The Ass Stick to let me bend the rules a little. Really, all these traditions are going to drive me crazy.”

“Well let me know, I owe you for last week's project.” Kushina’s eyes narrowed and she turned more towards Otsuka.

“Speaking of, how is that going?”

Otsuka shook her head. “Nothing yet. A week isn’t enough to tell anything, I expect it will be another couple of weeks before the trap is set off.” Shisui began to snore softly, drawing the attention of the two women in the kitchen. Otsuka bit her lip so she wouldn’t “awwww” loudly.

Kushina stood, making her way back to the door. “Well you two have fun! I need to get back to Mikoto before she blows a casket because Umi didn’t prepare her tea the right way.” Otsuka laughed and waved Kushina out.

Staring at Shisui, her heart clenched. She wanted a baby. She loved all her children, because as it was Kakashi, Obito, Gai and now Rin had all practically become her suto children, but she wanted to raise one from their birth. Besides watching Kakashi and Obito stumble over themselves to overprotect a baby would be the entertainment of a lifetime. She kissed Shisui’s forehead. It didn’t have to be hers.

Shisui accompanied her to work, curling up on the chair until her first appointment arrived. He stayed outside with Veridian until the appointment was over and came back in with a lollipop in his mouth. Otsuka raised an eyebrow but didn’t say anything. He deserved it. Shisui was always taking care of other people and he was only four.

Kin stopped by, introducing himself to Shisui and then dropping off some internal paperwork for Otsuka. Otsuka sighed as she stared at the new stack of paperwork on her desk. It never ended, did it.

“Can I help?” Shisui asked, standing up from where he had been on the floor drawing. Otsuka smiled at him.

“If you want to, come over here. Let’s see how good you’d be at being a counselor.” Yes, it was far too early to be trying to snatch up Shisui for a position at her department. Still Shisui already had skill, and honing it would give him an edge in the future as a shinobi. Raising shinobi children had taught her that she needed to give her children every advantage she could to help them survive. And by god she would make sure Shisui could outplay Danzo with his eyes closed.

Last week Inoichi had come to her with information on missing orphan clan children. Kin had talked with Inoichi about what he knew from T&I and Inoichi had been more than willing to provide. Otsuka’s blood was still boiling as she thought about every missing kid that no one had kept track of for years. Sure, It was unlikely Danzo could get his hands on Shisui due to his position as nephew to the Uchiha clan’s matriarch, but she wouldn’t risk it.

Otsuka pulled sticky notes, quickly covering the names and important information of the genin psych evals she had been going over. She handed him three files and then handed him some blank paper. “No peeking at the hidden information, okay?” Shisui nodded.

“What do I do?”

“Read over the psych evaluations, and then after you’re finished with the first one I want you to tell me what you think about it.”

Shisui frowned. “Is there something I should be looking for?”

Otsuka shook her head. “No, just asses.” She watched him walk over to the patient chair and begin to study it. She watched him for a minute before she turned back to the large stack of papers she needed to do. Grabbing the first one off the top she rolled her eyes. The constant approval for transfer from Kin’s department to her own papers was starting to get really annoying. There had to be a better way to do this.

“Otsuka-oba, it says that this person was given a rating of 4 out of 5 for their general readiness except they sound very scared all the time.” Shisui’s eyebrows had scrunched up and Otsuka held back her giggle.

“They do sound scared, what ratings would you give to them Shisui?”

“Well, I would give them a 2 out of 5 for general readiness. They are scared to be a shinobi so I don’t think they should be. And maybe a 3 out of 5 for mental health?”

Otsuka nodded. “You’re right the ratings aren’t accurate, but they are more of a guideline for someone who only has time to glance at the evaluation. Like someone who was assigning teams. Good job Shisui!”

“But why are they wrong?” Shisui looked visibly upset and Otsuka wanted to smack herself. She really shouldn’t have given Shisui something that could make him upset. Just having him assess correct gennin evaluations would have been smarter.

“Because they’re a good guideline for people like you who are learning.” Otsuka lied smoothly. Shisui seemed to accept the lie, moving onto the next one, less upset. She watched him begin to read the next one with enthusiasm and wondered how many four year olds had the social analysis Shisui had. She frowned. She wasn’t going to let anyone touch this boy.

~

Otsuka awoke to Shisui shaking her arm. “Wha-what?” Otsuka blinked herself awake, stretching. Shisui was smiling and began to shake her harder.

“Oba-san come ooooon!!! It’s 9 am! Let’s eat breakfast!” Shisui bounced up and down and pointed at the door. He’d patiently waited two whole entire hours for her to wake up, because it was the weekend, but now it was time for food.

“Got it, got it. Breakfast.” Otsuka said groggily. As she sat up she felt a rush of nausea. Kami, she felt so sick. She snatched up Shisui and stood with him, planning to head down stairs but her head had other plans. The moment she was on her feet she felt woozy, and she plopped herself right back down on the bed. “Ugh.” She rubbed her temple with her free hand.

“Oba-san?” Shisui stopped wriggling and stared at her intently. “What’s wrong?” Otsuka waved him off.

“Nothing nothing. Just stood too quickly. I need some water, I think I’m a little dehydrated.” Otsuka slowly stood back up, ignoring the pounding in her head and went down the hall, and downstairs to the kitchen. “Do you mind leftovers?”

Shisui shook his head, but he was still giving her that concerned look. She left him on the counter and was about to pull out the food when there was a fervent knocking on the door. Otsuka frowned and opened the door to reveal a breathless genin. “Namikaze-san! Mebuki-san has gone into labor and Kizashi isn’t back in the village yet, they need you at the Hospital!”

She was early. Well shit, Kizashi was going to be unconsolable when he found out. Otsuka put Shisui in the genin’s care and rushed to the hospital. Mebuki was in labor for a total of 14 hours, and after the last push Otsuka's beautiful goddaughter had been brought into the world.

“Sakura. I’m going to name her Sakura.” Mebuki smiled down at the baby in her arms.

“She’s adorable, and all that hair.” Otsuka commented, as she finally sat down for the first time in hours. She was feeling a little light headed, she hadn’t gotten any food or water and her headache had only been getting worse. Mebuki looked up at Otsuka and gave her a watery smile.

“Thank you, Otsuka.”

“Any time, Mebuki. You’ve been there for me for years, it’s only fair I do the same! Besides, how could I miss the birth of my adorable little goddaughter.” Otsuka watched tears fall down Mebuki’s face.

“Still, thank you, for more than you know.” Mebuki held Sakura tighter and wept. Otsuka hesitated in her seat, she couldn’t tell if Mebuki was crying tears of joy or tears of relief. Either way it was probably better to let Mebuki work through her emotions on her own for now. Two hours later the door slammed open to reveal a wide eyed Kizashi. He rushed forward towards his wife and kid and Otsuka decided it was finally time for her to take her leave.

As soon as she stood her head began to spin. She made it out the door and a few steps down the hallway before the dizziness became too much and she collapsed.

“Ma’am!” A nurse came running down the hallway, squatting down next to her. “Are you alright?”

“Just dizzy I-” Otsuka stopped as panic began to set in. *‘I’m alright. I’m okay.’* She began to reassure herself, attempting to take a deep breath. Instead she found she couldn’t manage to settle down her breathing. The world around her blurred as it became harder to distinguish what questions the nurse was asking her.

“Otsuka.” It was Tsunade’s voice that cut through the noise. Otsuka blinked, trying to focus on the woman who had appeared before her. “Breathe.” And she did.

Tsunade brought her to an empty hospital room, and began running a diagnostic jutsu over her. Asking her questions about what she had been doing today and the day before. When Tsunade finally finished up she smiled at Otsuka. “I’m going to put you on some fluids and have one of the nurses bring you some food. You’re going to need it. Congratulations Otsuka. You’re pregnant.”

And Otsuka’s world stopped spinning.

Chapter End Notes

> Okay SO MANY THINGS! 1. I'm not sure when chapter 36 will be published, as it is I didn't get to review this chapter as much as I wanted to, expect chapter 36 on the 20th. 2. What did we think of the steam? Do we want a full Minato and Otsuka smut? I'm trying it out for now but let me know. 3. Holy shit over 10,000 hits wth? I'm stunned. This story means so much to me and every

comment, Kudo, and view makes me so excited. Thank you all so much for sticking with this sotry, I'm excited to show you where it goes.

Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

> Ah, I know, I know it's much later than I said. I'm actually in a show right now and it's Tech week so between my midterms and rehearsal I've been pretty exhausted. Honestly expect the next chapter the third Wednesday of November because the first two weeks of November I'll be a dead person walking. I'm also trying to stay ahead of the chapters and edit at the same time and it's literal hell. Anyways enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Otsuka was laying in the garden in the backyard, contemplating her future. She had been shocked to hear she was pregnant. She and Minato had almost always worn protection, and Otsuka had been on birth control since she had started dating Minato at her own mothers insistence. Tsunade had explained that it wasn't totally shocking that she might have gotten pregnant when they hadn't used protection. Something about chakra super sperm messing with birth control during a woman's fertility cycle. Otsuka hadn't understood but Tsunade had assured her that as long as she stopped taking birth control the baby would be totally fine.

A cold breeze flew through the backyard. She was six weeks along, which meant she'd be due in early October. Minato was going to be ecstatic, another addition to their family. Otsuka stared down at her stomach as if she could see the baby growing within her. Happiness curled within her and she smiled. A baby, and honestly she'd been thinking about wanting to have a baby for months now so it was perfect timing. Well maybe not.

Having a child within the first year of Minato as Hokage would spell danger. Especially with what Otsuka was currently digging her fingers into right now. It wasn't a good idea to keep this plan from Minato any longer than she had to. Still, sending it in a letter to the man was a terrible idea, and leaving Konoha was out of the option now that she was pregnant with the future Hokage's child. She'd have to wait until he returned home and then she could tell him she was pregnant. And she could tell him about the mole.

She felt conflicted about what to do. She wanted Minato to know first, but there was no way she could keep this a secret from Kin or Shikaku, and she wanted to tell Mikoto and Kushina. She'd have Kin fill Shikaku in on their current plan and together the three of them could adjust their plan. Then she would tell Mikoto and Kushina when she went to pick Shisui up, as for everyone else, they could wait.

Otsuka sighed. Minato only ever had the best timing or the worst timing. Deciding it was time to change, Otsuka made her way into the house and into her bedroom. Tsunade had helped her schedule her next prenatal appointment and had explained what to expect from a shinobi baby. It looked like she'd have to start taking quite a bit of Chakra supplements in order to keep up with the baby's development.

Otsuka pulled on a pink skirt and a floral top. Konoha was entering spring and Otsuka was feeling like a skirt more than her usual pants. She wanted to feel the cool breeze against her skin today. She made the bed and got ready in the bathroom before she left. There was a twinge of loneliness at the sight of only her toothbrush in the bathroom, but it felt when she realized she wasn't really alone after all.

A baby. An adorable baby. What gender would they be? And who would they look more like? And how much hair would they have? And what day would they be born? How was she going to decorate their room? Every possible answer brought her more and more joy. She was going to have four children, well five. Rin was a part of the family now too. Maybe six if she considered Jiraiya as a kid too.

Kakashi and Obito would make wonderful older brothers, and Gai would be so supportive that he might actually singlehandedly teach the kid self-esteem. The idea of having to wait until October to meet them was daunting, and honestly Otsuka wasn't looking forward to the idea of being pregnant. It was as limiting as it was exciting. The baby was worth every moment of it, but she was already dreading the aching feet, morning sickness and disgusting awful horrible hormones.

A baby. Otsuka reminded herself. An adorable Minato-esque baby.

Mikoto screamed when Otsuka told her. She yanked Otsuka into a hug from her place on the bed and began crying into her shoulder.

"Mikoto!" Otsuka hugged her best friend back.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm very excited for you! It's the stupid hormones!" Mikoto kept her head buried in Otsuka's neck.

“It’s fine, as long as you're okay” Kushina came up behind Otsuka and hugged her.

“Your baby is going to be so cute, ya know! With Minato’s hair and cheeks and your eyes and smile, that baby will have all the girls and boys swooning.”

“Our kids are going to be best friends.” Otsuka declared, pulling away from Mikoto and sitting herself on the couch.

“They’ll go to the academy together too!”

“Between Mikoto, Tsume, Ami, Yoshino and Inoichi’s baby we’re going to have a year filled with clan heirs.”

“And you too!” Kushina added, poking Otsuka in the side.

“I know! I’m excited! Well maybe not for the pregnancy.”

“How so?” Mikoto was giving her a concerned look.

“It’s not that I don’t want the baby!” Otsuka rushed out, “I just am not looking forward to morning sickness or taking Chakra supplements for the next year. It’s just a lot, and I know Minato will do his best but he’ll be just as busy with his first year as Hokage and-”

“Kushina hugged her for me!” Mikoto ordered and Kushina pulled Otsuka into a hug a second later.

“Minato would do anything for you, Otsuka. He’ll find a way to juggle everything, and besides. I’ll kick his ass if he doesn’t, ya know!” Otsuka laughed and Kushina hugged her harder.

“Thank you Kushina. So Mikoto, have you and Fugaku settled on names yet?” Otsuka smiled at her best friend. Kushina groaned and threw herself backwards onto the couch.

“No, don’t start it.” Otsuka rolled her eyes at Kushina. She hadn’t seen Mikoto in a week and a half and the names Mikoto and Fugaku’s favorite names changed practically every hour.

“Fugaku keeps insisting on Haruki-”

“Sunshine is about the last thing I would name and Uchiha.” Kushina snorted.

“Kushina!” Mikoto glared over at her. “I don’t like Haruki, I keep

telling him that! Besides Haruki is too close a meaning to Taiki."

"Wait, what about Akio? I thought you loved that one?" Otsuka moved to pour herself another cup of tea.

"That was about four favorites ago, Otsuka." Kushina supplied.

"I don't know, I'm not sure about Akio anymore, besides I want something that matches well!"

"Akio and Haruki sound very nice to me." Otsuka knew it wasn't her place to tell them to just decide already but she thought maybe Fugaku should get a name and Mikoto should get the other one.

Mikoto sighed. "Maybe Akio should be back on the table but I just know that Haruki is NOT going to work!"

"My vote is still on Ryo and Ryu." Kushina added.

"Please stop suggesting terrible names to my wife." Fugaku hadn't even knocked and just glared at Kushina before turning to smile at his wife. "Otsuka, it's good to see you."

"Hello Fugaku." Otsuka greeted, letting Fugaku slip past her. He kissed his wife on the forehead before handing her a list.

"I'll be back in time for dinner. Here's my list of names for today." It was a little bit of a miracle that they hadn't gone through every name in existence yet. Mikoto waited for him to leave before she flipped open the paper.

"Sora? Definitely not. Takeru? Not bad, Kushina put that one on the maybe list! Kota? No way-" Mikoto stopped suddenly and mouthed something Otsuka couldn't hear. "Sasuke. Sasuke. Sasuke."

"Sasuke?" Kushina asked. Blinking confusedly at Mikoto.

"Sasuke. That's the name Kushina. Sasuke."

"Alright I'll put it on the-"

"No Kushina. I mean it. Sasuke." Kushina met Mikoto's eyes and stared at her for a few seconds before an adoring smile spread over Kushina's face.

"Sasuke it is."

~

Minato had thought he was ready. He had thought bringing his students along would be a show of good faith considering they were all still genin, even if Kakashi and Obito were technically chunin level. And yes he had known that Onoki was going to be a pain in the ass about this treaty but never in his wildest dreams had he expected this.

“BRAT! YOU THINK YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH TRYING TO SWINDLE IWA OUT OF ITS MONEY! I’M ONTO YOU BLOODY YELLOW FLASH!”

Minato sighed, putting his head in his hands. He had thrown his poker face to the wind a long time ago. Hiruzen, maybe because he’d been dealing with Onoki for years, didn’t even bat an eyelash. Akatsuchi, who was seated next to Onoki, pinched the bridge of his nose. Because this was the third time Minato had suggested a compromise that would help Iwa more than it would Konoha.

“Tsuchikage-sama, please consider the agreement before you reject it.”

“No Akatsuchi. I know the brat is up to something and as long as I’m alive I won’t let him get away with double crossing Iwagakure!”

Minato wondered if it was too late to turn down the hat. A glance at Hokage-sama told him, yes, yes it was. Pulling his cheerful attitude back to him Minato straightened. The Hokage had been trying to gauge what Minato would do and it was time to prove he deserved this position. He channeled the Minato who could deal with Kakakshi and Obito’s constant fighting without much more than a smile and turned to the Tsuchikage.

“Tsuchikage-sama. I believe Konoha has offered you a very lucrative deal and if you believe it isn’t in your best interest then perhaps you could suggest a better deal? We are running out of options.” Minato gave Onoki a fake smile. “Hokage-sama, when exactly do you have to leave for Kumo again?”

Hiruzen’s eyes twinkled as he answered Minato. “Four days I believe?” Hiruzen pretended to consider the time.

“Ah well that won’t be very much time for us to approve the final

treaty." Minato turned his smile on Akatsuchi. "Perhaps we should leave you and Tsuchikage-sama to consider the deal over lunch, hm?" Akatsuchi swallowed hard while the Tsuchikage growled.

"You are so arrogant as to assume you can dismiss yourself, bloody Yellow Flash?"

"Onoki-sama I would greatly appreciate it if you didn't address my successor that way. I remind you he is currently working to stop further needless bloodshed." Hiruzen spoke up. Onoki glared and harrumphed.

"The both of you are useless! Leave for lunch while my counsel and I consider a better proposal."

When the door swung shut Minato turned to Hiruzen. "Well, that certainly went well." Hiruzen just laughed.

~

"Well shit."

"Congratulations!" Kin glared at Shikaku. "Go on, congratulate your cousin."

"Sorry, sorry. Congratulations Otsuka." Shikaku gave Otsuka a rare large smile, and then pulled her into a hug.

"Thank you Shikaku. Ready for another niece or nephew?"

Shikaku rolled his eyes but was still giving her a smile when he responded. "Between you and Yoshino I'm going to go gray by the end of this year." His smile disappeared as he returned to the more serious topic. "Now we need Otsuka out of the office as soon as Minato returns. I'm sure you can find a room in that house of yours to use as a temporary office for all your patients."

"Shikaku when Minato returns the war will officially be over. Our department will have a huge influx of-"

"Otsuka you're pregnant-"

"And that doesn't change anything. I understand I need to back off of

our plan, which is why I am here to talk with you about this. Shikaku I will not leave my department alone when we are going to start transitioning out of war time. PWI has literally never existed out of war time." Otsuka folded her arms, giving Shikaku a hard look.

"Kin can take over-"

"Actually Shikaku, I won't have the time. I'll need to handle reworking active duty shinobi back into daily life. I'm with Otsuka on this one, she needs to be here. I can pull the file out and we can wait-" Kin ran a hand through his hair.

"I will not wait! Kin think about the children who have been under Danzo's influence for how long? I can't even imagine. No this has to happen, we just need to take me out as a variable."

"And your original plan only works if you're the bait." Shikaku snapped at Otsuka. He gave a long, suffering sigh, revaluating his approach. "Can't Mebuki take over?"

"Not on her own. We're going to find problems in all our current policies. I can't expect her to do damage control for my entire pregnancy, especially after she just had her own baby." Otsuka seated herself on the couch in Shikaku's office. "Shi I'm sorry. I know you're worried about Yoshino and myself but-"

"No, no. I know what we're going to do but you're not going to like it Otsuka."

"I trust you Shi, with my life." And Shikaku knew Otsuka meant it.

Shikaku rubbed his temples and then pulled a scroll out as he began to write a missive. "Just promise me something Otsuka. Next time you decide to take on Danzo please warn me first?"

Kin burst out laughing. Otsuka gave him a small smile. "I make no promises."

~

"What?" Rin looked at Obito confused. Obito shrugged.

"I understood about as much of that as you did."

Kakashi growled. “It’s basic theory! Whatever, I’m just saying I can get us out of here.”

Obito’s head snapped towards Kakashi. “Really?!” He jumped up from the ground. “Then let’s go! I’m ready to get out of this room!”

“I don’t know won’t sensei get mad? We’re in Iwa territory…”

“Which is exactly why we need to explore!” Obito added, pulling Rin to her feet. “What do we need to do Kakashi?”

Kakashi smirked. “Here I’ll show you.” The escape plan was simple. Kakashi had drawn up a seal that once they each poured some of their chakra into would manipulate it through a set series of movements. To any sensor paying attention it would seem like they were still in the room, playing games or reading books. From there the three of them would henge and slip out. With Obito’s sharingan they’d be able to escape any Jonin that suspected them long enough to get back to the room.

And then Team Minato was set free on Iwa, and they did what any sensible shinobi would do in an enemy village. They wreaked havoc. Obito had taken one look at the giant statue of Onoki in the middle of the plaza and knew it needed to be covered in toilet paper. The eggs were definitely not Kakashi’s idea and Rin would never even dream of suggesting putting glitter on a statue of a Kage. The best part was that no one had caught them in the act or even noticed they’d left the room in the first place.

Except Minato sensei. Who had calmly walked through the door like nothing was wrong until the door closed behind him and he turned a cold glare on his students.

“I’m sending you three home.”

“Sensei! We said we were sorry! Please don’t-” Obito was cut off by a look from Minato.

“Obito you almost caused an inter village incident. In fact I’m surprised we aren’t back at war. It’s a miracle you didn’t get caught. That’s probably the only reason the Tsuchikage hasn’t decided to go to war with us again.” Minato could see the weight fall across Obito’s shoulders. Minato was certain the prank had been his idea.

“It was my idea, Sensei.” Rin spoke up rather suddenly. Minato had to work very hard to keep the smile off his face as he continued to glare

down at his students. He was beyond proud of them, even if he couldn't show them. Their teamwork and execution had been impeccable. Actually if he hadn't known Obito's penchant for pranks then he wouldn't have even guessed it was them.

Onoki genuinely wasn't sure if it was his star pupil Deidara who had done the prank or if it was someone from Konoha, and that was the only reason Onoki wouldn't do anything. "Oh?" Minato crossed his arms and stared down at Rin. The girl nodded, not even flinching back from her sensei's gaze. "And I suppose you made that seal too?"

Rin hesitated but didn't look at Kakashi. "Well I-"

"I made the seal." Kakashi spoke up. "It's a new design and I wanted to test it out."

"In enemy territory?" Kakashi tensed but attempted a nonchalant shrug.

"Rin was complaining about being stuck in the room so I told her I could get us out."

Rin nodded fervently. "And it's not like Obito could let us go by ourselves. We're a team after all." Obito looked over at Rin and Kakashi with wide eyes.

"Besides, it's not like the idiot could actually come up with such a good plan." Minato directed his gaze to Kakashi and watched as the boy did his best not to shift under his stare. He wondered if he enjoyed messing with Kakashi maybe a bit too much.

"Well, that won't stop me from sending you three home."

"But-!" Minato held up a hand at Kakashi's protest.

"You're needed at home. Shikaku sent me a missive requesting you three." Minato smiled at them. "It sounds like Otsuka has a job for you three, and I thought I would have more time to teach you while we were here. I'd rather you three be able to work together and train in Konoha than have to sit around in a room all day for the next couple of weeks."

"So we're not in trouble?" Obito asked.

"No, you're still in trouble, but we'll get to your punishment once I get back to Konoha."

“Awwww, Sensei!” Obito complained, falling back against Kakashi. Kakashi shoved him off and onto the floor. “Hey Bakashi!”

“What?”

“You pushed me!”

Kakashi raised an eyebrow at Obito. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. You just threw yourself onto the floor.”

Chapter End Notes

> Just an FYI expect us to dive right back into emotional turmoil next chapter

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

A day early! Also so close to 100,000 words!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gai and Genma returned before team 7 did. So when Otsuka opened her front door to hear Gai's voice carrying through the halls she smiled. "Gai?" Otsuka slipped her coat off and threw it on the coat rack. The door to the sun room opened and Gai came running out.

"Oba-san! You're home!"

"Hello Namikaze-san." Another head popped out of the door and waved at her.

"Hello, you must be Genma-kun." Otsuka let Gai pull her into a hug and kissed the top of the boy's head. It was nice to have him back in the house again. The boy practically vibrated next to her while he looked back and forth between Genma and Otsuka.

"Oba-san! Oba-san! Youthful Choza-sensei taught me so many things!"

"Oh? Want to tell me about it over dinner? I was thinking Ramen."

"Ramen sounds good!"

"Genma-kun? Would you like to come?"

"Uh yeah Namikaze-san. Actually I was wondering if the offer of staying in your home was still open?" Genma looked away, a little ashamed. Otsuka held back the coo that wanted to come out. He was so sweet, calling her Namikaze-san! Otsuka would probably correct him when she wasn't missing her husband and other children.

"Of course! Minato and Rin will be over the moon. Why don't we pick out a room for you once we're back. And I'll hire a genin team to help you move things into the house whenever you're ready." Otsuka hadn't even taken off her coat yet so she opened the door up again. Gai rushed to put his shoes on while Genma hesitated.

"You don't have to do that Namikaze-san I-"

“Otsuka is fine Genma-kun. You’re a part of the family now.”

“Exactly Gemna! Now come on! We have to eat a big dinner to restore our energy!” Gai began dragging Genma out the door and Otsuka laughed. She watched Genma struggle to put on his shoes while gai dragged him. Her hand unconsciously moved up to cover her stomach. Watching them made her even more excited. She was starting to understand why Minato had jumped at inviting Genma into the house.

Their family never stopped growing, and maybe once Otsuka might have worried that she wasn’t enough for her family. She smiled, hand falling away from her stomach. The timing was far from perfect but she knew it would all work out.

Genma and Gai regaled the trials of their training trip at Ichiraku for both Teuchi and Otsuka. Gai went into extreme detail about the rocky mountain and rapids his team had crossed all the while carrying huge backpacks to weigh them down. Otsuka could probably describe the mountain better than Gai himself could by the time she had finished her second bowl of ramen. She was a little surprised at how much she had eaten.

They picked up Shisui on the way home, Otsuka had to assure Mikoto that Shisui continuing to stay over wouldn’t be any trouble first. Genma ended up picking a room in the basement. He managed to convince Otsuka he didn’t have enough things to warrant her hiring a genin team, but what he didn’t realize was that in the process Otsuka had determined that Genma did not have nearly enough clothes or necessities and she was determined to spring a shopping trip on him on her next weekend off.

Team Minato except Minato himself didn’t arrive in Konoha until a week and half later. Shikaku had only been able to last three days before he started working from Otsuka’s office until Kakashi, Obito, and Rin arrived to be Otsuka’s unassuming bodyguards. Shisui had started challenging him to Shogi matches whenever Otsuka had a patient come in for a session.

Between Shogi lessons Otsuka had begun to assign reading to Shisui. She’d have him write little reports to her about the readings and as the days went by he’d already begun to pick up on Otsuka’s anxiety tells and started calling Shikaku out on his distraction tactics during Shogi games. Otsuka was beyond proud of the boy.

The two ANBU who had come back with Minato’s students hadn’t sent

a hawk ahead so Otsuk hadn't even realized they'd arrived home until she came home from work to a house buzzing with noise. Kakashi and Gai were having a staring contest and apparently the betting pool consisted of the last couple of cookies Otsuka had made and some Kunai.

Of course it had been a draw because when Otsuka came home she had disrupted the entire game as Obito tackle hugged her and Kakashi was right behind him to give her a softer hug. And as they were all due to catch up, Otsuka suggested Ramen, and she wouldn't dare tell Minato but she was beginning to crave it.

~

"I want one of you with Otsuka at all times. If you need to go to the bathroom or if Otsuka asks you to run an errand for you, two of you should go together and someone should stay with Otsuka."

"Why exactly are we guardian Kaa-chan?" Kakashi could feel a pit in his stomach.

Shikaku looked at Otsuka, who sighed. She couldn't tell them, Kakashi didn't need to know about Danzo, and right now was not the time to spring on them that she was pregnant. Shikaku continued. "I or Otsuka will tell you eventually but not right now."

Shikaku was right. Otsuka hadn't been happy when he told her that she needed to knowingly put her children in danger in order to protect herself. But he knew that Kakashi and Obito were more than capable of protecting Otsuka long enough for Viridian to get down the hallway to intervene. Between Kakashi's acute sense of smell and Obito's sharing they'd also likely be able to identify whoever the attacker was if they saw them again.

If they were at home, well Shikaku was more than confident the combined seal power of Minato, Kushina, Jiraiya and some work from Kakashi and Otsuka was enough to keep a bijuu out of the house. If it was daytime then Otsuka would be surrounded by civilians, shinobi and Shikaku wasn't actually sure if Mikoto had ever told the police department to stop watching over Otsuka. Besides, Otsuka knew better than to be out and about at night time right now.

The only thing Shikaku was unsure about was Rin. She was new to the team, but Kakashi was smart enough to know that if they split up Rin should not be on her own. The hardest part of the entire plan was actually convincing Otsuka that her children could handle themselves.

“This is a B-rank mission that I have special approval to give you.” It was kind of a lie, because Shikaku wasn’t technically Jonnin commander yet and if anyone asked, Tsunade was overseeing the village while Minato and The Hokage were gone. He watched all three kids' eyes widen.

“Don’t worry Kaa-san! We’ll protect you!” Obito shouted, smiling at Otsuka. She gave him a small smile back, shifting uncomfortably on the couch. Shikaku briefed them on a few more things before he handed the mission scroll over to Kakashi and was out the door. It was quiet for a few moments in the living room before Otsuka spoke up.

Watching the obvious fear fill Kakashi’s eyes had been enough for Otsuka to know it was imperative she tell him about her pregnancy, even if it wasn’t the complete truth. “I have some news, which will explain a lot about this mission.”

All three children looked at her with curious eyes and she took a deep breath. God Obitos and Kakashi’s faces were gonna be priceless.

“I’m pregnant!”

Obito’s mouth dropped open. “No way!”

“Congratulations Otsuka!” Rin was beaming.

Kakashi was staring at her, looking partially horrified and partially like he was going to cry. Otsuka felt her heart drop. And then Kakshi was running out of the room. Otsuka didn’t even fully get to her feet before he had gone out the door and was gone. The room was silent for a few seconds before Genma appeared in the hallway.

“Is everything okay?” He asked, looking around. Otsuka wanted to cry.

“Kaa-san…” Obito trailed off looking from the door to his mother. “Should I go after him?” Otsuka shook her head and turned to Obito.

“No Obito, you and Rin take my wallet and go buy the food we’d need for tonight's dinner so I can make miso with eggplant for everyone.

Genma-kun, would you mind going to find Gai? I'll be back with Kakashi soon."

"Otsuka, will you be able to find him? And Shikaku-san just told us to go with you." Rin asked nervously.

"I know where Kakashi is, don't worry."

"But Kaa-san-" Otsuka kissed Obito's forehead.

"Don't worry." And then she was out the door going after Kakashi. As she walked she felt the urge to laugh and cry at the same time. Kakashi was making a habit out of running out of the house when he was upset. But Otsuka was mostly upset with herself. She should have seen this coming. She should have waited to tell Kakashi when he was alone so she could talk with him.

Mianto and her had both suspected Kakashi was feeling a little threatened. Rin was, while kind, a sudden addition to the house, and now that Genma had moved in his insecurities had probably come back full force. Besides he was a growing teen going through hormones. Otsuka knew he was having a tough time right now, and reasonably so.

~

"Worthless?" Otsuka had asked. Rin had been escorted back to the orphanage by Minato and all four of the boys had gone to bed. Shisui had decided to spend the night in Obito's room. Otsuka had waited until after Minato had gotten back to ask him about the huge fight between Kakashi and Obito. The moment Minato returned he'd collapsed into her lap on the couch. He groaned at her in response.

"His words were: 'You're more worthless than she is.' I don't know what's gotten into him lately." Otsuka's fingers found purchase in his hair, beginning to soothe his headache.

"I know some of it is hormones, but worthless? Even for Kakashi that's…."

"I know." Minato sighed, dragging a hand down his face. "You should've heard the two of them go at it. I didn't know what to do Otsuka, I'm supposed to be there to guide them but I just stood there and watched!"

“It's okay Minato. I don’t know what I would have done either.” Otsuka’s fingers kept massaging her husband's scalp as she leaned back into the couch.

“What did Obito say?”

“He told me Kakashi said Rin would weigh the team down and when Obito objected Kakashi said that you two and he didn’t need Obito. He never mentioned the word worthless. Based on what Obito did say and his apology tonight… Minato I think Kakashi is projecting.”

“How so?”

“I mean Rin is sort of upsetting the balance of things. I think he’s worried about being replaced. I mean he’s been so frustrated by the jutsu he’s creating for months, and Gai only moved in a couple of months ago. It’s a lot of change and he’s internalizing it as his own fault for not being good enough.”

“Oh Kakashi.” Minato sighed, moving so he could sit up. “I just wish there was some way I could communicate with him better. I always worry I’ll make things worse.” Otsuka nodded, resting her head on Minato’s shoulder.

“I know exactly what you mean.”

“And well, I never know when it’s time to be his sensei and time to parent. Well as much as he’ll let me parent him. I don’t want to take Sakumo’s place but I-” He stopped himself short and dropped his head into his hands.

Otsuka felt her heart ache for Minato. She knew he wanted nothing more than Kakashi to consider him his father. She also knew Kakashi already considered Minato his father. But Minato and Kakashi were both far too scared to ask the other about it. The same went for Obito. Neither Kakashi or Obito had any memories of their mothers. It was easy for Otsuka to slip into a parental role as their mother because they’d never really had a mother.

Otsuka watched Minato. “I don’t think he’d think you’re taking Sakumo’s place. Who’s to say he can’t have two fathers?” He didn’t respond so Otsuka let the topic drop. She knew it made him anxious. “Do you want some late night comfort ramen?”

Minato lifted his head to meet Otsuka’s eyes. She was giving him a small smile. He smiled back and pushed the horrible anxiety of Kakashi not wanting him *out of his mind. “Are we going to sneak out?”*

“Obviously.”

Minato stood and grabbed Otuska’s coat off the coat rack. “Come on, we’re wasting precious ramen time.” Otsuka laughed and she had barely finished putting her shoes on before Minato had hirashined them to Ichiraku.

“By the way, where did you find Kakashi?”

~

Otsuka had to ask for the keys from the landlord. She was no ninja so the only way she could get to the roof of the apartment complex was the stairs. When Minato had told her that Kakashi had gone to their old apartment complex it had made a lot of sense. It probably brought him comfort when he thought about how it used to be just him, Minato, and Otsuka. And Otsuka just knew Kalashi was beating himself up over feeling selfish.

But it wasn’t selfish. It was normal. And it was okay. It was Otsuka and Minato’s job to ensure he felt loved, and make sure he knew that they still loved him. Not his job.

Kakashi didn’t even look when she opened the door. He was sitting on the ledge and Otsuka was suddenly very thankful the roof wasn’t so slanted that wouldn’t be able to walk across it without fear of falling. She closed the door behind her and made her way over to Kakashi. She seated herself far enough away from the edge that she wasn’t scared about Kakashi and turned her gaze on the view.

She could see the Akimichi compound from here, and the police building stood tall in the distance. The area had changed a lot in the last couple of years. Certain stalls and shops were gone, the building next to the apartment complex had been taken down and a small river and flower garden had been put in.

“Do you think Saeko-chan has moved out yet?” Otsuka asked. Saeko-chan was a chunin who had moved in next to Minato’s apartment a year before Otsuka had moved into the apartment with him. She wasn’t home often so in the last couple of months of living there Saeko has asked Kakashi to water her plants.

“She moved near the Uchiha quarter last year.” Kakashi responded. Otsuka nodded, and acted as if she didn’t know. She did know, because Saeko had begun dating an Uchiha and it was all Mikoto could talk about once she found out about it. Fugaku hadn’t been happy about it but the combined efforts of Mikoto, Kushina, and Otsuka had calmed him down enough to let the relationship be for now.

“Kaa-san…. I’m sorry I-”

“Kakashi.” Kakashi’s head snapped around to look at her, there were tears in his eyes. “You have nothing to be sorry for. You haven’t done anything wrong.”

“But I-” Kakashi cut himself off. He turned back around and Otsuka could read the tension in his body. “Congratulations.”

Otsuka wanted nothing more than to wrap him in a hug but she knew Kakashi needed space right now. “Thank you.” She paused, considering her options. She wanted Kakashi to broach the subject first but if she didn’t speak up now he’d take her thanks as confirmation that he was being replaced. Then he’d never say a word about it to her. “You’re going to be a wonderful big brother you know.”

She watched Kakashi go still. “I’ll try.” Otsuka frowned. She could guess what Kakashi was thinking but she wanted him to talk to her. To give him the chance to talk about his own feelings before she reassured him everything would be fine.

“Kakashi I-” Otsuka took a deep breath. Trying to settle her nerves enough to focus on the conversation she needed to have. “I’m worried about you.”

“I’m fine.”

“Are you?” Kakashi turned around to face Otsuka.

He hesitated when he met her eyes. “I’m okay.” Otsuka didn’t believe him. He stared at her a few more seconds, working up the courage to ask what had been killing him. “You’ll still be my mom, right?”

“Of course Kakashi! Minato and I will always be your parents, nothing can ever change that. This baby is an addition to our family, not a replacement. They’re not you, and they will never be you.” Otsuka wanted to hug him and wanted to start crying. God Kakashi, she had

known he was struggling with this on some level but it hadn't even crossed her mind until today he thought she didn't want to be his mother anymore.

Kakashi stared at her with wide eyes, tears streaming down his face. He climbed forward to hug Otsuka. "Thanks Kaa-san." Otsuka smiled and hugged him back.

"I know that feeling won't just go away, but you can talk to me Kakashi, okay?" Kakashi hummed in response. Otsuka figured it was enough for now.

After they'd returned home and Otsuka made dinner she decided that cooking for six growing ninja children every day for three meals a day was not worth saving the money. Minato wanted this many kids so he could pay for the expenses of six kids. So they had dinner and lunch out almost every day, and Otsuka made breakfasts. Though Genma and Gai still wouldn't let her pay for their lunches.

It had been almost two whole weeks with Kakashi, Obito, Rin, and Shisui at her beck and call and honestly Otsuka was loving it. Shisui would run messages through the building. Obito and Rin would often go get lunch for everyone which gave Otsuka the time to get more paperwork done as the copy of the treaty between Iwa had come through two days ago and already huge changes were being made.

Minato had sent a short letter explaining he should be heading back in about five days. He'd also commented that in comparison to the peace talks with Iwa, Kiri and Konoha's treaty was like tying a shoelace. He'd wished her and the kids well and then signed off to go to his next meeting.

Mebuki was due to be back to work tomorrow, which Otsuka was ecstatic about. She hadn't yet shared with her that she was pregnant but Mebuki would be overjoyed. Maybe their children would be in the academy together?

"Kaa-san, here's your ramen!"

"You got miso pork right? And TWO bowls this time?" Otsuka asked, not even looking up from her paper. She'd trained her kids well enough they knew not to peek. Unless they were Shisui, who she would black things out for. Two covered bowls were placed onto her desk and *oh Kami* Otsuka's mouth was watering at just the smell. She set her pen down and snatched up a bowl to start eating.

“Are you sure Ramen is what’s best for the baby?” Obito asked, he looked a little concerned.

“Do you wanna argue with her?” Kakashi asked. He was concerned about the salt intake from her too but Otsuka had been eating healthily. He’d gone with her to her first prenatal checkup the day before. Tsunade had explained that as long as Otsuka was eating enough calories, nutrients, and taking her chakra pills that Otsuka could have as much ramen as she liked.

Kakashi had been worried when Tsunade had explained that Otsuka would probably be eating insane amounts of food as her civilian body tried to provide enough chakra for a ninja baby. Kakashi was also in charge of making sure Otsuka took her pills while she was busy with work.

“Obito!” Rin admonished.

“Sorry! I was just trying to look out for the baby.”

Otsuka laughed. “It’s perfectly fine, Obito. Don’t worry, I’m taking care of myself, plenty!”

Shisui grabbed his food from Obtio and settled onto the couch. Rin seated herself next to him, digging into her own Ramen. “Minato-sensei is going to flip when he finds out.” Rin commented.

Otsuka burst out laughing. “Flip? That’s an understatement.”

“Hey! Sensei has perfectly normal reactions to exciting news.” Kakashi defended.

“Normal for him,” Obito shrugged. “I think it’s just because Sensei is just so in love with Kaa-san.”

“Nope, it’s because he’s silly.” Otsuka was already done and starting on her second bowl. Obito stared in awe because he hadn’t even opened his own bowl of ramen yet. And they had all thought Minato-sensei was the one who was obsessed with Ramen.

Rin started laughing at Otsuka’s comment. “You’re right! That’s a perfect description.”

Kakashi just sighed.

~

“Kami, her yawn is so cute!” Otsuka cooed over the baby who was in her arms. Sakura had already stolen Otsuka’s heart and Otsuka was certain her god daughter was going to take over the world.

“I know! She’s the sweetest thing, as long as she’s asleep that is.” Mebuki smiled down at her daughter. “I won’t have to bring her too often though, my siblings have agreed to watch her most of the time.”

“Don’t worry! Sakura can always spend the day in my office with me. That way she isn’t exposed to too many people coming up to your desk. Aaaand that way I can spend more time with her.” Otsuka sighed happily, relaxing back into her chair. “Do you mind if I hold her for the rest of the day? I’ll keep her safe I promise! I just- don’t know if I can let her go.” Otsuka felt like her baby fever was hitting her harder and harder. She was barely 9 weeks along and Otsuka was ready for her baby to come already.

She hadn’t even really started to show much yet and things like back pain and foot pain hadn’t even begun to become a problem. She just wanted the baby nooooooow. How on earth was she supposed to wait another 7 months at least.

“As long as she doesn't cause you any problems.” Mebuki glanced around the room at the group of children in Otsuka’s office. She’d ask later, her boss was always doing something weird. Having five kids in the office was better than the straight month of Minato coming with bouquet after bouquet leading up to their fifth anniversary. Which honestly didn’t sound bad except Minato never did things in halves.

There was one delivered in the morning, and then another for lunch, and a final one for the end of the day when he would walk her home. Mebuki had ended up taking flowers home and handing them out around the office because Otsuka and Mebuki had both run out of desk space within the first few days. Minato had somehow taken Otsuka’s shock at his dedication as a challenge to top himself for every following.

“Oh she won’t. I only have paperwork today anyways.” Otsuka looked at the stack of paperwork on her desk and groaned. Mebuki chuckled.

“Okay well I have to go over the notes Veridian left me, I’ll come back when it’s time to feed her.” Mebuki made her exit to start on the catch

up she'd be having to do for the next couple of weeks. Just glancing over the list of things Veridian had given her was already crazy. She had a long day ahead of her.

~

Otsuka was thanking Kami that Rin and Kakashi had taken Shisui with them for lunch. And honestly she shouldn't have gotten up and ran to the archives. But the seal that was alerting them for the trap was on her desk and it had lit up and Mebuki had just gone down to the archives. She hadn't done any actual ninja training in years and she had a baby to look after. And she had a sinking pit in her stomach as she ran with Obito.

One that was confirmed as she flung open the door to find Mebuki held at bay by Kushina's sword at her throat. The seal had summoned Kushina the moment it was opened. Otsuka met Mebuki's wide eyes before they rested on the folder she was in the middle of disposing of. Obito pushed past her to get between Otsuka and Mebuki but was staring at the woman with wide eyes. He'd known Mebuki as long as he'd known Otsuka and she'd always been willing to offer a warm hug or a kind word.

"Otsuka please wait outside for Shikaku and Kin to show up." Kushina's tone left no room for argument. "Obito don't leave Otsuka's side." Kushina motioned with her head back to the door, but her eyes never left Mebuki.

Obito guided Otsuka out of the room as she continued to stare at Mebuki in shock. The door closed and Otsuka was brought back into the moment. She swallowed hard and pulled Obito into a tight hug, burying her head into his shoulder.

"Kaa-chan… Haruno-san, she- What's going on? Why is she in trouble?"

Otsuka couldn't respond. Her throat was too tight. Her head was spinning. Mebuki. Mebuki, Danzo had taken Mebuki under her nose and she hadn't noticed. Or maybe Mebuki had always been on Danzo's side.

Chapter End Notes

I promise we'll see Minato very very soon. We'll also see some more babies very soon.....

Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

> 100,000 words I'm so excited! Anyways I haven't written any fight scenes in a long while sooooo sorry if it's not great.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Inochi hadn't seen Shikaku this angry in a long time. He was glaring through the one way glass at Mebuki who was currently strapped in a chair in the lower levels of T&I and staring at the ceiling. "I should have caught it. I should have known."

"How would you have known?" Inochi asked, he'd just come out of the cell to relay that the seal at the back of her tongue was preventing him from slipping into her mind as well.

"Her backstory played off of Otsuka's feelings too well. She was too perfect. Taking care of her sick mother? Bullshit." Shikaku growled. He'd never met any of Mebuki's family, which had been a fatal mistake on his part. They hadn't had any problems with Danzo in years because he'd had a plant near her all this time! He just kept on doing whatever he wanted right under their noses. "Did you get anything out of her?"

"No, that seal blocks her mind as well. How is Kushina faring with the seal?"

"She should be done soon. Give her another couple of hours."

"Well we'll have to wait until she's finished. Did Hokage-sama send word to Minato yet?" The Hokage had arrived home only yesterday. He had been preparing transfer papers for Minato's move into power when Kushina had barged into his office with Shikaku while Inochi and Kin had taken Mebuki into T&I.

"Yes. He was already on his way home, the news should reach him by tomorrow morning. Hokage-sama also stationed an ANBU team around Otsuka's house. Fugaku stationed some UPD members too. She's got the kids in there with her too."

"Good." Inochi nodded. Now that they'd found Danzo's plant he would probably try to free Mebuki before Kushina could reverse engineer the seal. "We were so close to catching Danzo too. Once

Minato was Hokage it would have been so easy to clean house of him."

"If he had Mebuki, how many other plants does he have?" Shikaku knew there was more to this. Missing children, so many missing children Danzo had to be doing something with them? How many plants were still under their noses. Finding root members would be harder said than done. Once Danzo was dead they could go completely unnoticed and they'd just be loose cannons then.

"I don't know Shikaku. I don't know." Inochi stared at Mebuki through the glass. After a moment her gaze shifted from the ceiling to meet his eyes through the mirror she shouldn't be able to see through. Her eyes widened and then the wall behind her blew up.

~

Kakashi was the first person to hear it. There was a low buzz in the house that had come out of nowhere. He, Gai, Otsuka, Shisui, and his summons were all sitting in the living room. They had been cuddling puppies while Otsuka had just started crying into Bull, again. She'd been on and off crying since they'd returned home, but Kakashi had been too numb to do anything but summon his ninken. He'd just perched in the corner of the room and watched the cuddlefest from afar.

He had been cursing himself for not realizing there was something suspicious about Mebuki earlier. He hadn't totally understood what she had betrayed them all for, but it was clear she was a traitor.

And then he had registered the low buzz that had started up. He frowned and looked towards the door that led to the sun room. He knew that sound. But where- It was the seals! He whipped his head around to look at the beautiful intricate seal placed over the front entrance and shot up. It was glowing blue. Something was wrong.

The moment he shot up his ninken and Gai saw exactly what he was looking at and shot into action. Gai shook Otsuka and pointed up at the seal while holding his finger to his lips. Kakashi surged forward to grab his tanto from its place on the counter. They needed to get to the library. It had two secret exits from the house, one came up near the Uchiha compound and the other delivered them to the Nara forest.

But Kakashi needed to get Obito, Rin, and Genma's attention. Obito and Rin were in the Dojo and Genma was taking a shower down the hall. In a split second decision Kakashi motioned for Uhei to go get Genma and signed to Gai he was going out. He didn't wait for a response, just shot down the hall to the back door to the garden. He barely heard Otsuka's cry for him to come back. He trusted Gai and the rest of his ninken to take care of her and the baby. They'd be safe in the house.

But Rin and Obito were only on the Namikaze grounds, which were not nearly as protected as the house. The moment he left the house he had to avoid a barrage of shuriken and two seconds later he was dodging a fireball jutsu. He whirled around to parry the killing blow an ANBU tried to deliver to him. Why was an ANBU attacking him?

He blocked an overhead attack and glanced around the yard. There were three ANBU fighting a little ways off. There was one fighting off another two while he protected a downed Uchiha. Kakashi growled. He needed to get to Obito and Rin. Setting his sights back on the ANBU he was fighting, he slipped his tanto back into its holster. Then he prepared himself for the jutsu Minato-sensei had expressly forbidden him from using. He waited for an opening and shot forward, "Chidori!"

His hand went right through the ANBU's chest and he tried not to think about the warm blood that was now coating his arm. He pulled his arm free before hearing a pained shout. That was Obito! Kakashi turned on his heel and Shuishined towards the Dojo, arriving at the door just in time to see Rin stabbing an ANBU in the leg with a Kunai. Obito was lying on the ground, clutching his leg.

"Obito!" Kakashi's shout drew the attention of Rin and the two ANBU in the Dojo. The ANBU in the raccoon mask moved to take advantage of Rin's distraction but Kakashi shot forward to tackled Rin out of the way of the wip heading her way. They hit the ground and rolled. Rin losing grip of her Kunai as they fell.

Rin was up a second later freeing some wire and shuriken from the holster she had on. Kakashi met her eyes and nodded, understanding the plan before it even needed to be spoken. He pulled his tanto free from its holster once more and used the wall as a way to get some height on the ANBU closest to him in a Mouse mask. The Mouse blocked the first few strikes with a kunai before having to doge the first few Shuriken Rin threw. Kakashi immediately moved towards Obito, scooping him off the floor and running to the other end of the

Dojo.

Obito pulled the Tanto out of Kakashi's grip and threw it behind him, towards a target Kakashi couldn't see. Obito's fully formed sharingan were spinning when Kakashi set him down against the wall. Obito gave him a pained smile and a thumbs up. Kakashi didn't have time to respond as he spun away from the wall and towards the ANBU headed for Rin.

Rin was fending off Mouse as Raccoon prepared a jutsu he never got to finish. Kakashi surged forward, slapping two seals onto Raccoon's vest. They were both exploding tags. Kakashi ducked under some of the ninja wire Rin had placed and switched enemies with Rin. Rin just needed another wire before he could activate the seals. And as he saw the shuriken fly in the corner of his eye he jumped backwards and activated both seals.

With nowhere he could more Raccoon was forced to swap out of his chestplate with Obito, the only thing he could switch with in the room, which put him in the line of fire of Rin's shurkin and gave Obito the perfect position to get Mouse with a giant fireball jutsu. Except both explosion tags were fake.

Obito's fireball jutsu landed and had Mouse screaming but Raccoon had managed to avoid Rin's shuriken. And then he was behind Rin moving to cut off her head. Kakashi felt his heart drop, he couldn't get across the room in time with all this wire in the way. No, no, no, he needed to save Rin!

Except Raccoon stopped a few centimeters short of Rin's neck, and he fell away to reveal a furious Minato.

~

Otsuka watched Kakashi run down the hallway and left out a barely restrained shout. He was running out to danger! But Rin and Obito were out there. Her heart almost stopped. Oh god, if Danzo was descending upon them would they be okay? Gai had begun to pull her down the hallway towards the library and Otsuka grabbed Shisui off the floor and let herself be led down to the library. She and Shisui were civilians. Shisui might have dreams of becoming a ninja but if Kakashi, Obito, and Rin weren't equipped to take on Danzo's men then

there was no way Shisui was.

And it had to be Danzo's men right? Who else would try to attack their home? Because it couldn't be intruders, could it? She couldn't decide which terrified her more so she stopped thinking about it. She needed to stay calm. The seals would keep them safe and alert Minato, Kushina, and Jiraiya all at once. That was three Hokage-level forces that would be heading towards her house all at once. They'd get here in time. They had to.

Shisui was gripping her back tightly, she looked down at him and saw his eyes filled with fear. She held him closer. Genma appeared at the top of the stairs to the library barely dressed and flew down the steps towards them. He barely made it to the doorway before he had to turn around and dodge a kick from an ANBU who had appeared behind him in an instant. A second later the ANBU had thrown Genma into the wall. The boy's head practically bounced off the wall and Otsuka watched in horror. Genma! He wasn't getting up. She sobbed into Shisui.

Gai moved to stand in front of her and Kakashi's pack surrounded both Otsuka and Shisui. No, she couldn't let Gai sacrifice himself for her, and poor Shisui, he couldn't die because Otsuka had decided to meddle in Konoha's affairs while her husband was gone. She couldn't let them die for her. She took a breath and held back a sob as she remembered she was pregnant. Her baby. A baby who wasn't even close to far enough along to survive her death.

It was Gai and Shisui, or the baby and her. It was an unfair terrible choice. But it was one she had to make. Otsuka saw the ANBU's blade surge forward and without one more thought she threw Shisui at Gai and stepped in front of the both of them.

~

It was a pulse of chakra and a tingling in the back of his head that stirred Minato from his sleep. He blinked himself awake, in a bit of a haze before he felt the pulse again. The fog in his brain cleared and he felt fear and anger grip him. Those were the seals for his fucking house. Something was happening and whatever it was it spelled danger. He hesitated as he paused to consider letting someone know he was leaving, but whatever was happening was more important.

He'd send a toad later.

He reached for one of the various hirashin around his home and *pulled* . He was deposited in his dining room. But he could feel Otsuka's hiraishin seal below him and he pulled again. In time to stop the sword headed towards his wife and behead the ANBU who'd tried to do it. His kunai slid through the ANBU's neck with enough force to send the man's head flying.

He snapped around to check over his wife. She was crying and Minato felt a cold rage begin to burn in his chest. Whoever had done this was going to pay with their life. "Otsuka?"

Otsuka's eyes fluttered open and she sobbed. "Minato." She threw herself forward into his arms but pulled away a second later. "Oh Kami, Minato the kids! Kakashi went to find them! He's out there!"

"Out there?" Minato asked.

Otsuka yanked on his arms but was barely coherent as she repeated herself. "Kakashi! Kakashi! KAKASHI! OUT- MINATO! YOU HAVE TO-!"

"Kakashi went to get Rin and Obito! They were in the Dojo!" Gai filled in. And Minato was gone once again, Hirashining into the Dojo in time to stop a diffrent ANBU from trying to murder one of his kids. One glance around the room told him enough and as his eyes found over Obito an eerie calm fell over him.

He could feel Jiraiya and Tsunade entering his yard, and there were about 10 other ninja he could recognize heading towards and arriving at his house. He needed to get Obito a medic, and then he needed to get rid of the last enemies on his property. And then he'd find out just what had happened.

~

Kushina barely managed to get Mebuki out of the arms of the unidentified ninja before they made their way off into the night. Her chains shot out, wrapping around Mebuki and yanking her towards her. Mebuki sailed straight into Kushina's arms. Kushina ducked out of the way of a boiling stream of water headed towards her face.

A moment later the ninja was frozen in place as Shikaku claimed their shadow. Kushina frowned and glanced around, looking for the other ninja who had been in their group only moments ago.

“Behind you!” Mebuki called out, and Kushina had kiwarmied out of the way and beside Shikaku who had finished taking down the first enemy ninja. From here Kushina could see the ninja and blade that had almost injured her.

“Take her Shikaku, I got the rest of them.” Kushina dumbed Mebuki on Shikaku. She needed her hands free and Kushina knew Shikaku would be fine staying in one place. Kushina unsealed the katana and scroll from the seal on her back and rushed forward. Her katana surged to attempt to take off the head of the enemy nin closest to her, knocking the kunai flying at her away with the scroll in her other hand.

The enemy nin locked swords with her before Kushina danced away to avoid the earth jutsu of the nin that had gotten underground below her. The moment the nin surfaced from underground Kushina let her scroll unroll about two feet and activated the first seal that sent an enormous fire ball. The enemy nin with the sword was at her back again, going for an overhead strike Kushina slipped under as she heard the screams that told her the fireball had hit both of the other enemy ninja. Her katana came up to catch the nin's hand and they cried out, dropping their own katana. They lept out of her reach but Kushina had already unfurled her scroll another two feet and released a wind strike at the nin who had managed to survive her fireball.

Kushina kicked the fallen katana well away from the other nin and kept herself between it and them. She watched them both closely, waiting for the inevitable attack. It was the twitch in the left nin’s leg that alerted her to the barrage of taijutsu attacks they were about to hit her with, while the other prepared a jutsu. She let them come close, moving into a lower stance and let the scroll unravel another four feet. She pulled the scroll up in front of her at the last second and activated it so two jutsu hit in succession, water bullets shooting out towards the farther nin and a lightning jutsu hitting the other nin in the face.

A moment after the jutsu hit, Kushina made short work of the nin, slitting their throat. She let the scroll come undone the last couple of feet and then sent a mud wave at the final shinobi. As they moved to doge Kushina smirked, she had them. She activated the second seal on the scroll again and watched as the wind jutsu came out, stronger this time, and tore the man to shreds.

She waited for a moment, making sure all three nin were dead before she cleaned her katana of the blood and rolled up her scroll. She

turned around to find Shikaku had rebound Mebuki's hands and placed a suppressor seal on her again. Kushina rechecked their surroundings before nodding at Shikaku, the enemy nin hadn't made it to the border of the village, but they had come damn near close.

"Are you both alright?" Kushina asked.

"We're both fine, we should-" Shikaku was cut off by the alarm that sounded out through Konoha. It was a code blue. It put all of Konoah's shinobi on alert, and called Chunin and higher to report for duty. The break into T&I hadn't been serious enough for the entire village to be on alert. It was better not to let anyone besides the Jonin in Konoha know that there had been a problem at all, unless something else had happened. Kushina and Shikaku shared a look.

"Oh no."

"What?" Kushina snapped at Mebuki. She was furious that a traitor had been under all their noses for this long. But she had a bad feeling, and Kushina was rarely ever wrong about things.

"Otsuka, he wouldn't." Mebuki was talking more to herself than Kushina and Shikaku. But his cousin's name was all Shikaku needed to hear before he was certain something had happened.

"Kushina-"

"I'm on it." And Kushina was gone, disappearing into the trees, at breakneck speed towards Minato's house. But it didn't matter in the end, because Kushina had barely made it halfway to the house before she caught sight of Minato, carrying Otsuka, his team and an entourage of ninja surrounding him as he headed towards the Hokage tower. She landed in front of him and could see some of the tension in his shoulders visibly relax.

"What happened?" Kushina could see how shaken Otsuka was without even needing to see her face. The woman didn't even look up to see who had spoken, she just kept her head buried in Minato's shoulder.

"Root." Was all Minato responded with, but it was enough. By the looks of it, it had been a close call. Kushina felt the urge to snap someone's neck, but didn't let the bloodlust that the Kyuubi was offering her over take her.

"You don't know it was root Minato." Jiraiya scolded, but his tone and face were void of any humor.

“They hit T&I too, tried to take our prisoner.” Kushina responded.

“Mebuki!” Otsuka’s head shot up and she addressed Kushina. “Is she okay?” Kushina did her very best not to frown. She tried for a comforting smile instead.

“She’s okay. Back in custody. Shikaku is taking her back to T&I.”

“Custody?” Minato gave Kushina a questioning look.

Kushina sighed. Now was not the time to tell Minato his wife had been watched by Danzo for the last 8 years without anyone realizing. Especially not if Danzo had just attacked his family.

“Mebuki was working for Danzo.” It was Otsuka who spoke up. Kushina almost stumbled at the force and dread that filled her as Minato lost control for a moment and his killing intent filled the street like a heavy cloud of smoke. It was gone a moment later, as he got himself back under control.

Minato pulled Otsuka closer to himself and pressed a kiss to her cheek. Kushina could feel him reaching out, with calmer chakra this time, towards his students to help steady them from the blow. But when Kushina met his eyes she knew Minato was going to go on a warpath. She wondered passively if he even knew his wife was pregnant yet. Probably not.

Minato whispered something into Otsuka’s ear, and she nodded. “Kushina, would you take Otsuka and my kids with you to stay with Mikoto for now?” Kushina nodded. If the situation hadn’t been so upsetting she’d be touched he trusted her with his family. “Otsuka, will you be alright to walk?”

Otsuka took a deep shaky breath. “Ye-”

“No.” Jiraya spoke up. “Tsunade doesn’t want her walking. She needs to recover from the stress, it could be ba-” He stopped himself short of revealing something he wasn’t even supposed to know. “The stress will aggravate her wound.” Tsunade hadn’t been able to stay after she’d checked over everyone, she was needed at the Hospital. Tsunade had given Jiraiya explicit instructions not to let Otsuka strain herself anymore after quickly explaining the situation.

Minato hadn’t been willing to trust Otsuka and his children with anyone besides Jiraiya, and he would be needed while they got to the bottom of everything as Konoha’s spy master. He had planned to take

Otsuka and his students with him but Minato trusted Kushina with the world. It would be better if Otsuka wasn't anywhere near T&I anyhow.

Kushina could take down an entire army by herself, and the Uchiha compound was possibly the second safest place in Konoha, after Minato's house. But Root had gotten through their seals, and Jiraiya was determined to figure out just how they had managed to get through the combined efforts of three seal masters.

"I can carry her." Kushina offered. Minato nodded. He paused to kiss his wife goodbye before handing her over and moving to hug his students. Kushina could hear him whispering something that sounded suspiciously like praise and comfort. Minato stood and gave Kushina a fierce look.

"Take care of them."

"Of course." Minato took a deep breath and then squared his shoulders and left. Kushina stared for a moment stunned at the man. It was as if she had just watched him become Hokage before her eyes.

~

Shikaku led Hiruzen, Jiraiya, and Minato to the room Mebuki was being held below the Hokage Tower. T&I had a second facility prepared for when their main building was broken into. He led them into the room and Minato felt his anger spike when he saw her sitting in the chair. He had trusted this woman, treated her like a friend, and she had always been gracious and kind. She'd helped him come up with the surprise for Otsuka for their anniversary last year.

He felt sick.

"Mebuki is it?" Hiruzen asked, but it sounded less like a question and more like a threat. The kunoichi nodded.

Hiruzen had begun to wonder just how far Danzo had gone when he realized many of his shinobi had begun plotting something. He hadn't been able to figure out exactly what it was, but he'd noticed when a seal had been placed in the Hokage's office. He hadn't said anything, and he'd even left it, because he trusted Minato. But nothing had ever

come of it, and he was beginning to wonder just what exactly he'd been overlooking.

"Kushina didn't finish reverse engineering the seal on her tongue, but she was almost done." Shikaku handed the scroll with Kushina's work over to Minato who unrolled.

Ibiki, who had been waiting for them in the cell, smirked from his place behind her. He had joined T&I only two years ago and was already one of T&I's best. "She doesn't need her tongue for Inoichi to get information out of her."

"That won't be necessary." Minato snapped the scroll closed and stepped forward towards Mebuki. He leveled her with an angry glare and watched her shift in her seat. Bringing his hands up to her face Minato released the seal. Mebuki's face twisted in pain for a few moments and then settled into a look of surprise.

"You did it!"

Minato frowned at the excitement in Mebuki's voice. "Kushina had basically finished it." Minato stepped back and met Hiruzen's eyes. Minato was scheduled to be announced as Konha's fourth Hokage the day after he returned, which meant it would be tomorrow morning. But it was clear he wanted to take the lead on this.

Hiruzen considered Mebuki for a moment before nodding his head at Minato and leaving. In a few hours HIruzen would have nothing to do with these decisions, it was time to let Minato take the reins. "You have until noon, Minato." Hiruzen called out, he'd give the man time, but Hiruzen wanted the hat off, and he wanted it off now.

Minato waited until Hiruzen had left before he let the room fill with the killing intent he'd been holding back. The entire room froze, and Mebuki shivered under the pressure of it. "You have five minutes to tell me everything you know." Minato let the unspoken threat hang in the air. Mebuki had been instrumental in Otsuka's self-confidence, and for that he'd give her one chance to explain herself. But only one.

Chapter End Notes

> I hope you liked this chapter! Please give me feedback and any thoughts you have. Next week chapter should be up on Wednesday so no delay!

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

> Ugh, the past month has been a shit-show for me. I'm sorry for not getting this chapter anywhere close to out on time. I don't love the end, but I really just wanted to get this out to you. Enjoy and tell me what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mebuki had given Minato more information than he knew what to do with. Inochi had almost thrown up when he'd emerged from his mind scan of her. He'd confirmed every single thing she'd said, which meant it was all true. Danzo had been stealing children away and pitting them against each other in a cruel death match.

And Orochimaru… Minato could barely believe it. Minato was sure he'd never forget the look of betrayal written across Jiraiya's face when Mebuki had explained it. He couldn't let any of this continue, the question was if he should hit Orochimaru or Danzo first. Both would need Konha's best and he would never admit it aloud but he knew Hiruzen could have no part in either attack.

"The only way to ensure we take them both down without the other escaping is to hit them both at once." Shikaku was standing over a large map of Konoha and its surroundings with Jiraiya.

"We don't have the manpower to gather by tomorrow night. We'll have to pick one, besides we don't know for sure where Orochimaru's base is." Jiriaya turned back to the map. "We could try here, or here." Jiraiya pointed on the map again and Shikaku marked the spots. "I can't think of anywhere else that Orochimaru's hideouts could be."

"Mebuki can you remember any other details?" Minato asked the woman still strapped in the chair.

"Not besides what I told you. I wish I could remember more, I'm so sorry-."

"We have time for your apologetics later." Minato cut her off and moved to look over the map as well. "Danzo is our first concern. We just need to hold Orochimaru off until we've taken Danzo out."

"Hold off Orochimaru?" Jiraiya asked incredulously. "And how do you

plan on doing that?"

Minato gave Jiraiya a chilling smile. "Oh I have a few ideas on how to do it." Minato pulled a scroll out of the seal inked onto his forearm and unfurled it. In the center of the scroll was a complex seal, curling and twisting back and forth across the parchment. He activated the seal and a familiar sword emerged.

"How on earth did you-" Shikaku was cut off by Jiraiya.

"Is that what I think it is!?" Jiraiya's pitch went up a few decibels.

Minato barely smothered the smirk that wanted to spread across his lips, instead he shrugged. "Kiri didn't think I could make good on my threat."

"And they let you take it home?!" Jiraiya looked like he might cry.

Minato smiled, with more humor this time. "I didn't ask."

When Minato found Otsuka she was surrounded by a pile of children and ninken. It was still the early hours of the morning and she was petting Urushi while staring at the ceiling. Fugaku had let him in through the backdoor, and told him Kushina was watching over them in the living room. Kushina greeted Minato with a half smile, standing from her place at the table. Her fingers brushed over Minato's shoulder as she left in a form of comfort.

Otsuka lifted her head and let out an audible sigh of relief when her eyes landed on Minato. Urushi lifted his head from her lap to let her free herself from the sleeping pile around her. She stepped over Obito and Akino, and carefully around Gai who was sprawled across the ground before she was free of the pile.

Minato met her halfway there and pulled her into a bone crushing hug. He buried his head in her hair and tried to assure himself she was okay. Otsuka dug her fingers into his jonin vest he still had on, letting herself take solace in the fact that Minato was home. Home and here to protect her and the kids. They were safe. They were safe. Otsuka sobbed and gripped Minato even tighter.

"I missed you."

"I missed you too." Minato pulled away just enough to rest his forehead against hers, his hand coming up to run through her hair. Otsuka had tears streaming down her cheeks but she was smiling at

him. He lowered his head enough to meet her lips with his and sighed into the kiss. Otsuka gently tugged him even closer to her and lingered in the kiss for a few more seconds before she pulled away.

“How’re you feeling?” She asked and Minato blinked at her a few times.

“How am I? How’re you, Otsuka if I hadn’t gotten there in time you would’ve-”

Otsuka shushed him, she didn’t let her tight grip around his vest soften, but she took a small step back from him. “Later. I-I can’t talk about it right now.” She blinked away more tears and turned back to her husband. “Mebuki- is she-”

“Fine. We finished the first interrogation half an hour ago. She’s cooperating for now. I’ll tell you about everything later. Shikaku filled me in on your plan, Otsuka I can’t believe you-”

“I know, it was stupid, I should have told you.”

Minato caressed Otsuka’s cheek, capturing her lips in a kiss again. “Maybe, but you didn’t tell me for a reason. Actually I don’t think I would have done anything differently than you did.” Otsuka looked at Minato, shocked. “You caught the mole and now we have more than enough evidence to take Danzo down.”

“Are you serious?”

Minato nodded, smiling at his wife. “Mebuki gave us everything, she-” He stopped himself. “Well we have a lot to talk about but not right now.” He subtly pointed over at the children behind her. Otsuka couldn’t tell from where she was but Minato knew Kakashi was awake, his breathing had changed ever so slightly. “Besides, Hokage-sama made it official. He’ll send out word once the sun rises for a village wide meeting and I’ll be named Hokage at noon.”

Otsuka’s face split into a giant smile. “Really!? I’m so happy for you!” Otsuka practically hurled herself at her Husband who was only a foot away from her already. Minato grinned and hugged her back.

“Now, I just need to come up with a speech…” Minato trailed off as it occurred to him he should have been preparing for this far before now. Otuska *and* Kakashi laughed.

The loud laughter had quickly woken everyone else in the room up

and before long the entire house was up and getting ready for Minato's coronation. Minato, Gai, and Rin picked up clothing for everyone from the house, and Pakkun insisted on Kakashi going and picking out bow ties for all of the ninken's collars.

Otsuka made breakfast with Obito and Genma while they waited for everyone to return, and prepped tea. Obito and Genma didn't say anything when Otsuka's hands started to shake after Minato left, and Obito took the more delicate task of breaking the eggs so the yoke wouldn't break before Otsuka could even try. Genma poured the tea.

~

"Minato." Otsuka called, he was preparing himself to join Hiruzen on the balcony and was fervently repeating his speech.

"Huh?" Minato gave Otsuka a nervous smile.

"I have something for you." Reaching into the bag she had carried with her today she pulled out a wrapped present. She handed it over and watched him for his reaction. Kushina and Mikoto had confirmed he would love it, and she knew he'd love it too, but she wanted it to be perfect for him.

Minato looked at his wife a little shocked, he hadn't expected any presents, even if this was his dream come true. He felt a little silly, of course Otsuka would get him something. It felt like a little lightbulb had gone off in his head. He had been worried about both his children and Otsuka while he'd been planning last night, but looking at Otsuka now he knew. She gathered strength from those around her, she gathered strength from him. Looking at her now he couldn't help but marvel at how strong she really was. He grinned at her and then tore off the wrapping.

In his hands was a piece of clothing, it unfolded into a long coat with a fire print that ran across the short sleeves and the bottom of it. "Otsuka it's so cool!" Otsuka bounced on her feet and motioned a little wildly to him.

"No, no, turn it around!" He flipped it to the other side and his smile grew to the point his face hurt, the Kanji for Yondaime was written across the back. "Mikoto and I looked at the laws and it doesn't say

you can't customize your Hokage robes, so I figured…" Otsuka motioned to the coat. Minato snatched her up into a hug.

"This is the coolest thing I own. Otsuka thank you, oh kami look at it!" He pulled away to admire the stitching on the sleeves and then noticed something on the inside. He flipped the sleeve inside out and his jaw dropped. Upon closer inspection the inside of both sleeve's were littered with various seals he recognized as a mix between Kakashi, Kushina, and Jiraiya. And along the inside of neck was a seal he'd never seen before. "Otsuka… is this, did you create this seal?"

She nodded. "It's just to keep you warm or cool depending on the season. Nothing crazy like some of what Kushina put on there. She reall-" Otsuka was cut off as Minato kissed her. A spark ran up her spine when their lips met. She sighed contentedly, and let him decide when to pull away. She could practically feel how happy was and the knot that had been in Otsuka's stomach loosened a little.

"I love it."

Otsuka watched him for a moment. "Are you gonna put it on?" He blinked at her and then jumped into action, slipping it on and doing a dramatic turn.

"How do I look?" When he met her eyes his breath caught in his throat. The look Otsuka was giving him was the same one she had given him the moment she had asked him to marry her. Somewhere in the back of his mind he registered he'd been wearing a coat like this that time too. His heart raced and for the first time in a long time, maybe ever?, Minato felt like he was the most precious thing in the world to someone. He tried not to cry.

Otsuka's voice knocked him out of his thoughts. "You look like a Hokage." Then she seemed to realize something. "Wait, I think Hiruzen just called for you, you need to go!"

Minato blinked away tears as he nodded. "Y-yeah. Yeah! Shit! Bye, I love you Otsuka! Wish me luck!" Minato fled onto the balcony, trying desperately to remember what he'd decided to say for his speech. But of course it was gone, and all he could think about was the look of love and joy written across his wife's face. So maybe he winged his hokage speech. But it brought Hiruzen to tears so *that* had to say something. No one ever said Minato Namikaze couldn't think on his feet.

~

Kushina felt him coming before she saw him, but she had desperately wanted to see Minato's hokage speech. Still Inoichi stopped at her side and with one look from him she knew Minato had something planned. She leaned down and gave Mikoto a hug, she had come in a wheelchair, it was too risky to have her standing that long. Obito seemed to recognize something was happening and stepped closer.

"Don't worry Kushina-oba, we'll make sure Mikoto-oba gets home safe!" Kushina smiled at him and then they were off. Fugaku, Tsume, Hizashi, Choza, and a number of ANBU were already waiting inside the KPD building. It was a ways off from the attack point but Danzo wouldn't be able to keep track of what was happening inside.

"Where's Shikaku?" Kushina asked, slipping behind Fugaku and stealing the man's coffee. If they were attacking Danzo, and Kushina was certain they were, then they needed him with them. But then Jiraiya wasn't here either. "He won't be joining us, Minato has him taking care of something else with the Sannin." Fugaku answered. Kushina took a dramatic sip of Fugaku's coffee and he just rolled his eyes. After spending the past few months with a Kushina infested house things like this had become more and more normal to him.

Kushina frowned. Danzo and his followers would not be easy to take down, it wasn't in Minato's best interest to split them all up. Unless there was something else they had to worry about. Kushina turned her attention to the task at hand, she needed to change since she had the opportunity and she'd see if she could get someone to help her braid her hair. She'd like to keep as little of Danzo's guts out of her hair as she could.

She emerged only a few moments later and unsealed a different scroll. It had more sealing materials in it. If she had the time to prepare then Kushina would ensure this team could take Danzo down. "What's the plan exactly?"

Inochi pointed to two spots on the map he was hovering over. "Jiraiya scouted it out last night. This is definitely Root's base. Jiraiya said he wasn't sure just how many entrances there were into the base but he found the best points of entry for our teams." Kushina seated herself on the ground glancing at the map before she did so.

"You, Choza, ANBU teams Sho and Li, and I will take the western

entrance. It's the one Danzo will know we know. We'll be the distraction. Fugaku, Hizashi, and Tsume will take the other ANBU team with them. They're going to get as far into the complex as they can before Minato- Sorry Hokage-sama arrives. Fugaku is taking the Hiraishin Kunai in for him." Inochi glanced over at Fugaku.

"Tsume will split and follow Hokage-sama wherever he goes while the rest of our group takes out the stragglers" Fugaku added. "Once Danzo is dead you'll know, the seals on all of the Root members should be lifted."

"They may have an adverse reaction to their leader being killed. You all will need to be careful, they likely will no longer care about surviving and just taking out as many people as they possibly can." Inochi warned the groups. "We'll attack once we receive the signal from Shikaku. Kushina we should have about an hour, can you make enough signature concealing seals?"

Kushina grinned. "Well I have a stockpile of those already, but I can do you one better. I have this mass teleportation seal I've been meaning to try out. We'll only need two people to sneak up on them." Kushina dipped her brush into ink and began to form the base of a seal. "One for each group, I can power both seals. They'll be a massive drain and I'm the only person who can take the hit, no offense Fugaku."

Fugaku didn't take the bait and instead ignored the glint in Kushina's eye. Last time he'd fallen for it he'd been covered in glitter for days.

~

Minato's first act as Hokage was to rip out the carpet of the Hokage's office. Well technically it had been to summon the sannin to his office, and then he'd signed off on Danzo's assassination, but if anyone asked Shikaku that would be his answer.

Slipping into the Hokage's chair and sitting at the Hokage's desk was surreal but Minato didn't have the time to enjoy it. Right after he had finished signing the documents to approve Danzo's assassination and had someone run to send a summons for all three of the sannin Minato had practically ripped apart the Hokage's office.

“Monkey, Horse!” Minato hadn’t had time to learn just who was on his ANBU protection detail yet, but Monkey’s chakra reminded him an awful lot of Kusuke and Minato had worked with Horse before. The two ANBU appeared in front of him like ghosts. Minato pointed over to the couch where Shikaku was sitting. “Move that to the side, and get the desk up against the wall.”

Minato dropped to his knees and took a Kunai to the rug. “Minato what on earth are you doing?” Jiraiya had been prepared to arrive early, Tsunade was the one who was planning to walk with Orochimaru to the office. Jiraiya wasn’t sure how long he could keep up the pretense around his teammate ex-teammate.

“I need to make sure the seal hasn’t degraded too much, it’s been about eight years.” Minato stuck his fingers under the carpet and pulled. He could feel some of the staple give way and Jiraiya moved out of the way as Minato kept pulling the carpet back. Under it was a large faded seal.

“How long has that been there?” Monkey even sounded like Kusuke. Minato didn’t respond though, instead he knelt to assess the seal before nodding and standing back up.

“Alright, now we just need to put everything back.”

“Put it back? Minato, you just pulled up the carpet. You really think no one will notice the difference?”

Minato began rolling the carpet back out over the floor. “Well I needed to make sure our plan would actually work. The seal could’ve worn down and exploded for all we know.”

“And what would you have done if it hadn’t been in working condition?” Jiraiya’s brow was furrowed. Still he moved to help Minato smooth out the carpet. Monkey and Horse began moving the couch and Desk back into their positions.

Minato shrugged. “I would’ve figured it out.” Jiraiya looked like he wanted to smack his student Hokage or not. “Now I don’t know how long I’ll take but I’ve given Shikaku a barrier seal to activate once Orochimaru decides to try to make his escape. It should hold long enough for me to finish up with Danzo and then Hirashin back.”

Shikaku, who hadn’t moved from the couch either time it was moved, stirred from his meditative position. “Inochi just informed me they’re ready once Orochimaru has arrived.” Minato nodded. He unsealed

Kiribachi from the scroll he'd had on him and handed it over to Shikaku.

"Be careful with my new sword please!" Minato practically sang, he was still basking in Jiraiya's shock from earlier in the day.

"I still cannot believe you have that. Actually, does that make you one of Kiri's seven swordsmen?" Minato hummed and then gave his teacher an innocent shrug. He turned back to Shikaku.

"I'll leave you all to it. Try not to let Tsunade kill Orochimaru before I get here." And then Minato reached for the Hiraishin symbol on his wife and pulled. He appeared next to her while she was in the bathroom brushing her hair and she practically jumped out of her skin.

"Minato! You scared me." Otsuka turned to Minato and gave him a soft glare.

"Sorry, sorry. I wanted to give you a run down of our plan and this was the easiest way to find you." Otsuka took a deep breath, setting her brush down on the counter. Minato stepped behind her to wrap his arms around her, breathing her in. "But first-" He cut himself off by pressing a kiss to her cheek, and his hand snatched the brush off the counter.

He pulled away just enough so that he could brush her hair himself and Otsuka met his eyes in the mirror. She watched him for a few moments before taking a deep breath as if to steel herself for something. "Actually Minato, I have something to tell you."

"Is it that you love me?" Minato grinned at her and Otsuka grinned back. The nerves that had been in her chest fell away. She'd been worried.

He'd gotten there in time to save her the night before, but he'd had to have known she had thrown herself infront of Gai and Shisui. And how would he react knowing that she'd put their baby in harm's way. Admittedly she'd been thinking about it all morning. She was so unsure of how to feel. Because she'd make the choice again, but that didn't mean she wanted to die or that she wanted her baby to die and it- it was just all too much.

And there Minato was, smiling at her even though she knew he was about to go take root down from the inside. She knew it wouldn't be pretty, because she was certain there would be children fighting for

someone who had kidnapped them. He was smiling at her like she was the most precious thing in the world. It reminded her of something he'd told her once. *"I want it this way. We'll fight and have our disagreements, but I'll always be coming home to you."* He was right.

"Well no, but I do love you." Otsuka turned around to face him, temporarily interrupting his brushing. "After you left I found something exciting out."

Minato cocked his head at her and gave her an encouraging smile.

Otsuka took a deep breath. "I'm pregnant." Minato blinked back at her for a few seconds like his brain had short circuited. The brush fell out of his hand and clattered on the floor. It took his brain a few moments to catch up with him.

"You- you're-?!" Minato's hands shook before he reached out suddenly and scooped Otsuka up, twirling her around in the small bathroom that was attached to Mikoto's guest room. Otsuka's feet knocked against the wall a little painfully but she just reached out to wrap her legs around his waist. "We're going to have a baby!"

Otsuka laughed at the joy in her husband's voice and that was written across his face and Minato started laughing with her as he stopped spinning slowly. Minato pressed Otsuka against the wall and kissed her. His hands tangled in her shirt as he feverishly made out with her. Otsuka hummed at the heat Minato provided and pulled Minato in even closer til they were flush up against each other.

They broke apart, panting. Minato's head fell onto her chest and Otsuka rested her cheek on top of his head. "How far along are you?" Minato whispered, he spoke it so softly Otsuka almost missed it.

"9 weeks as of four days ago." Otsuka sighed contentedly as Minato shifted them both so that he could take the weight off Otsuka's hips. Because of course her husband had noticed she was uncomfortable without her having to say anything. Sometimes Otsuka wondered if Minato was a gift from Kami. He had always had this way about him that told her he knew exactly what everyone was thinking.

Minato looked up at her, smiling but there was worry in his eyes. "And how're you doing?" And if that wasn't a loaded question Otsuka didn't know what was. But she ignored it.

"How're you doing? What do you think? A baby is a lot of work." Minato watched her for a moment. He was studying her. The image

of the anguish on Otsuka’s face when she had thrown herself in front of Gai and Shisui offered itself up in Minato’s mind. And suddenly Otsuka’s deflection made sense. This was something they’d talk about later.

Minato felt the telltale pull of his Hiraishin kunai being used. “It is, but I’m ready if you are.”

Otsuka smiled. “I am.” Minato kissed her again.

Chapter End Notes

So we are nearing the end of the story, god I'm so sad but excited. Next up baby Naruto....!

Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

> Sorry about chapters taking so long, College is crazy, but I think we all get that. Please read the notes at the end, I have some important information to share. Otherwise, please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Minato found himself in a flurry of blades, fire, and teeth. He ducked under Tsume's attack aimed at a random Root member and grabbed his hiraishin kunai off the ground. He threw it towards the opening and retrieved a few more kunai from one of the seals inside his coat. He'd only had a few minutes to look over the seals but Kushina had decked the thing out. The coat could probably survive anything short of a blade.

Throwing more kunai around the room before making his exit, Minato teleported himself to the first kunai he had thrown. He'd left enough in the room that it wouldn't be a problem for someone to grab a kunai and throw it again if they really needed him. He took a moment to close his eyes and gather nature chakra. He needed to try to find Danzo before he escaped, and gathering enough nature chakra for sage mode while he was moving would be hard but even if he didn't complete it in time for his fight with Danzo it would come in handy for Orochimaru.

The root base was practically a maze that Minato was sure he would have gotten lost in if he didn't suddenly feel the ping of Danzo's chakra. He turned on his heel, headed down the hall and *ran* . It was definitely a trap if Danzo had sent out a wave of chakra but Minato was on a time limit. It was a risk he'd have to take. He broke down the door to the room he could feel Danzo in and almost immediately was rolling out of the way of a wind blade that could have taken his head off.

Minato barely sidestepped the seal that was on the ground while he dogged and he threw two kunai into the wall. He hirashined out of the way of two fireballs and another wind blade and stopped an inch before he stepped into a different seal that likely would have killed him somehow. More kunai flew from his hands, this time all aimed for Danzo who avoided them with ease. Danzo sneered.

“Well if it isn’t the new Yondaime.”

Minato raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t take you for petty comments Danzo.”

Danzo glared. “Please. You think you are saving Konoha? You are dooming her.”

Minato shrugged, he wouldn’t take the bait. “If you say so.” But there was a glint in his eye Danzo caught which was the only thing that let him avoid him from being stabbed behind, but in the process he dogged into Minato’s rasengan. It split Danzo’s head open but Minato had barely blinked when Danzo was somehow alive again a few feet away from him. Minato’s eyes narrowed.

“Think I would really die that easily?” Danzo taunted. He reached over and unwrapped his arm to reveal five sharingan embedded into his arm, five *eyes* . Minato wanted to throw up. He could barely contain the rage that was building inside him as he stared at Danzo’s arm. He had taken Uchiha’s eyes. Was that why he had tried so hard to take down the Uchiha? To *harvest* them like animals?

“I had hoped.” Minato responded finally, he swore in his own head as he realized he had lost his hold on the carefully building Nature chakra. He had to start again. Minato didn’t give Danzo any warning as he flashed forward, this time aiming for Danzo’s arm. He wasn’t sure how Danzo had just escaped death but if Minato had to guess it had something to do with those sharingan. One of the five on his arm was closed.

So it was either see if killing Danzo another four times would work or get the arm off him and see what happened the next time he killed Danzo. But it was like Danzo had anticipated his move because Danzo was dancing around the room again, shooting off jutsu and throwing kunai left and right.

Minato found himself wishing he hadn’t handed off Kiribachi to Shikaku. The weapon was big enough to provide a better defense than Minato was usually capable of when he was using a sword. Still in one fluid movement he unsealed a katana Jiraiya had gifted him a few years back and shot forward, catching Danzo‘s arm and tearing through it like butter. The man cursed loudly and Minato barely had the time to teleport out of the way of Danzo’s kunai.

Danzo managed to nick his side and Minato hissed through the pain. Minato’s katana cut through Danzo’s next fireball and blocked the

kunai Danzo sent his way before Minato was flashing forward back on him. It was a flurry of strikes and blocks while Minato did his best to avoid the barrage of jutsu Danzo was throwing at him. The man kept trying to escape, while Minato stepped in and out of range of jutsu.

Minato sidestepped the original seal he had avoided on the ground while he lashed out to try to catch Danzo's other arm with the Katana. But his over reach cost him as one of Danzo's wind blade's struck home and hit his arm. He dropped the Katana and teleported away from Danzo, clutching his arm.

He hadn't hit anything major but Minato was fairly certain if he tried to hold anything right now it would fall out of his hand. The Yondaime considered the man in front of him and came to the decision that this had gone on long enough. Besides his last Kunai was finally in position. He formed and rasengan and moved. He was flashing so fast between kunai Danzo couldn't keep up, which was what cost him his head, again.

Or so Minato had thought until Danzo reappeared again and that time he cursed aloud. How the fuck was he- oh. Danzo was panting across the room from Minato, but when he had come back this time the bandages over half of Danzo's face hadn't come with him. And where Danzo's left eye had been there was now a sharingan that was fading. Minato smirked at Danzo and then he was running the man through with Kakashi's own jutsu, a chidori.

It felt right to kill the man who had tried to kidnap his son with a jutsu his son had created.

When Minato teleported into the Hokage's office, ready to take on his next opponent he found the man already dead, his blood had definitely stained the carpet.

Jiraiya cleared his throat, doing his best not to look at Orochimaru's headless body. "You're uh- you're seal worked a bit too well."

Shikaku was still seated on the couch, and Tsunade was still holding Kiribachi looking at it like she was simultaneously horrified and amazed. Shikaku raised an eyebrow at Minato. Minato looked confused until he followed his gaze to the head Minato was currently holding. The Yondaime had the audacity to give his brother-in-law a breezy smile. "Just needed to make sure he was dead."

Minato grabbed a scroll off his desk and sealed it. "Now, if I'm correct, we have a village to run. So Monkey if you wouldn't mind cleaning up

the office. Shikaku get Fugaku in here. Sensei, I need you to call a meeting among the clan heads and Hokage's advisors. Tsunade if you wouldn't mind I'd really appreciate it if you made sure I didn't bleed out."

~

Minato sighed as there was yet another knock on the door. He really needed a secretary. Maybe he shouldn't have immediately fired Hiruzen's secretary, he would have at least stopped everyone from coming in the door. Maybe he should use an ANBU as a stand-in for now? "Come in." He called.

The door flung open to reveal his team and Otsuka. A wave of relief washed over him. The past 48 hours had been so hectic he hadn't even had the chance to go home. He felt like he might fall asleep any second honestly.

"Sensei!" Obito called, and practically jumped over the desk to give him a hug. Minato caught him with a laugh and reminded himself that his pseudo-son was alright. Minato let himself relax a little as Rin came up and joined them. She was welcomed into the hug while Minato met Kakashi's eyes and motioned for him to come over and join them. Kakashi sighed but came around and melted into the group hug no problem.

"How're you three?"

"Alright, we were worried about you-" Rin started

"So we came to check on you!" Obito finished.

Kakashi pulled away first and hovered off in the corner. Minato felt his heart pang a little. Somehow he had missed that Kakashi was withdrawing himself from Minato again.

Otsuka stepped behind Kakashi in one smooth motion and pushed him forward lightly. Kakashi glared at his mother but moved back into the hug as Otsuka joined. "Plus we wanted to congratulate you. Your first 24 hours as Hokage!"

"Wow, I guess so, huh. Should we celebrate with ramen?"

“Between your and Oba-san’s obsession with ramen I’ve had enough ramen for my lifetime.”

Minato frowned. “Since when have you been obsessed with ramen Otsuka?”

She shrugged as she pulled away. “It’s just my cravings.”

“Oh. OH!” Minato hadn’t really forgotten but being reminded that they were expecting sent a wave of happiness through him. He squeezed his kids a little tighter as he realized he hadn’t really asked Otsuka ANYTHING about her pregnancy. He knew nothing about pregnancy in the first place. “Do you know the gender yet? When will we know? Wait, have you had any prenatal appointments yet? When’s the next one, I need to come, and we should start taking baby class-”

“Sensei knows?” Rin asked. She hadn’t seen them get any time alone for Otsuka to tell him.

Otsuka nodded, laughing as Minato spiraled further into his father panic. Otsuka deftly caught Kakashi as he tried to slip away again and pulled him into her side. She was going to make sure the two of them settled this today. By the end of the conversation they would realize who they were to each other and then she was going to make Minato talk to Obito and make sure they hammered it out too. No more dancing around this topic.

“Can you leave the office Minato?” Otsuka asked. He met her eyes, stopping his freak out.

“Well, I probably shouldn’t but….” He seemed to be weighing the pro’s and con’s but Otsuka decided for him. Sure he should get out of the office but this was a sacrifice for the greater good.

“Well, we’ll go pick up ramen and eat it here. Kakashi, why don’t you stay and keep him company?” She gave him a firm squeeze as Obito clambered off Minato and Rin pulled away too. Otsuka walked over and leant down to give her husband a kiss on the cheek. She gave him a stern look and mouthed ‘Tell him. Now.’ and then she, Obito, and Rin were out the door leaving Kakashi and Minato alone.

Minato swallowed hard. He knew exactly what she meant, but now was really not when he wanted to ruin his relationship with Kakashi. If he didn’t tell him though, Otsuka would be disappointed. Who was he to disappoint his wife? “Hey Kakashi. Can we talk?” Minato winced when he watched Kakashi flinch. Yeah, probably not the best choice

of words.

“Yes Sensei.”

“Actually it’s about that. I don’t want you to call me Sensei anymore.”

Kakashi felt his stomach drop. He should have seen this coming. He should have *known.* “Of course Hokage-sama.”

“What?!” Minato startled, “No! No! That’s not at all what I meant- Kami I’m really fucking this up- I meant-” Minato rubbed his temples and took a deep breath. He really really wished he had Otsuka’s skill with heart-to-hearts. “Let me just try again. I have no wish to replace Sakumo. But-”

Minato bit down hard on his lip and hissed at the pain. His anxiety had spiked. He caught sight of Kakashi’s hand’s shaking and- was Kakashi scared? He stopped and really looked at Kakashi. He was trembling and he had moved backwards practically against the wall. Minato threw caution to the wind because he trusted Otsuka. He trusted Kakashi. Kakashi would understand.

Minato stood and crossed the room. Standing in front of Kakashi. “I consider you like my son Kakashi. I just want to be able to call you that. And maybe, if you want that is, you can call me Tou-san?”

Kakashi cried. And Minato hugged his son.

When Otsuka returned with the rest of her children she beamed at Minato and didn’t even bother to come up with a reason to hug the life out of Kakashi. Kakashi had been marveling over Kiribachi with his newly appointed father when Otsuka opened the door, catching the tail end of a ‘Tou-san’ as she came in.

They ate ramen as Minato told the story of how the legendary sword had come to be his. Obito attempted to pick up the sword no less than ten times while Kakashi eyed the sword with a sort of gleam in his eye. They finished up, but before they could leave there was another knock at the door. Minato was beginning to hate that noise.

Inoichi emerged from the other side and smiled apologetically. “Hokage-sama, I have the final report from Kushina.” Minato nodded and turned to his kids.

“Well, you all have the week off, but I expect you to keep up your training. Otsuka, if you wouldn’t mind staying behind for a bit.”

Otsuka looked surprised but nodded. “Inoichi go get Fugaku and Hiruzen, Shikaku too. Oh and Homura and Koharu.” Inoichi bowed before he left and Minato saw the preteens out.

Otsuka settled herself on the couch and relaxed into it. Minato placed a seal over the door to deter anyone from entering until it was taken down before dismissing his ANBU. Moving to join her, Minato pulled Otsuka closer. Otsuka took a deep breath before she faced him. She knew exactly what he was doing.

“Can I take you up on that later now?” Minato asked. Otsuka’s fingers dug into his coat as she nodded at him.

“Where do I even start?”

Minato’s hand found hers and squeezed. “Mebuki?”

She shuddered. “I had no idea. She’s been a plant for years Minato and I had *no* idea!” Her head dropped to his shoulder. “I trusted her, she helped me build PWI. And all that time she’s been *helping him* , under my nose. We vetted her and she was totally clear. I’ve met her mother!”

“Danzo and Orochimaru picked well.”

“I thought I had been making things better all this time Minato, but in reality I just-” Otsuka cut herself short as she choked back a sob. She wanted to make a difference, not make it easier for Danzo to do whatever the fuck he wanted. She wanted to change lives, like hers had been changed.

Instead she had practically opened the door to Danzo, let him come into her home and hurt her family! He’d broken through seals done by seal masters like it was cake. And it was just supposed to be a distraction so they could extract Mebuki. Danzo had threatened her CHILDREN just to cover his own ass.

She’d wanted to protect them. Her kids, her baby, Minato, the life she had built for them but instead- instead it was all just- just- “Fuck!” Otsuka half sobbed, half screamed into Minato. She let it out. Let what was building inside her pour out.

As he rubbed her back Minato held her. He pressed his cheek to the top of her head, listening to an anguish that didn’t need words. Slowly Otsuka calmed, left with hiccups and a sore throat. When she pulled away Minato used his sleeve to clear the tears and snot, smiling gently

at her. “You taught me that strength comes from your emotions. Feeling them, acknowledging them, and then taking the next step forward is strength. And you my love, are the strongest person I’ve ever met. When you need me, I will always be here.”

Otsuka let out half a laugh as she hiccuped. “I know. The baby- when I jumped in front of Gai I didn’t want to-” Otsuka swallowed hard. “I want to live. I just don’t want you to think I don’t.”

Minato shook his head, reaching up and tugging on a strand of her hair. “I know.” He smiled at her and Otsuka smiled back.

~

To say the first meeting Minato had as Hokage with his advisors went well would be a stretch. Removing Homura and Koharu from their seats had been no easy task. It was Hiruzen in the end who had convinced them to step down. After that Minato had appointed his three advisors and they’d gotten to work.

Root was a problem. It had been disbanded but Konoha now had around 100 emotionless ninja, from 30 to 5 years old, with no allegiance that they had no clue what to do with. Shikaku had suggested reintegration and Fugaku hadn’t been keen on the idea. “How could we be sure it worked? Besides, reintegrating them would take resources Konoha doesn’t currently have.”

“Who would run such an operation?” Hiruzen asked. “The only people qualified to work on deprograming already have their hands full.”

Minato frowned. “We have failed our shinobi, and these children already, we cannot deny them the opportunity for a life that was taken from them.”

“And we cannot risk the safety of Konoha’s current residents. Civilian and Shinobi. We can take the children but to attempt to fully reintegrate every shinobi touched by Orochimaru or Danzo could open the door for their revenge. ” Fugaku crossed his arms, frowning. He didn’t like the idea of abandoning anyone, but he had to think for the good of all of Konoha.

“Then what would we do with them?” Hiruzen asked.

“House them away from Konoha. Supply them with what they need to

survive." Fugaku suggested.

"We'd still need to reintegrate the children." Shikaku reminded them, from where he was off to the right of Minato. "Inochi has offered to oversee the entire process."

Minato shook his head, frustrated. "We can't spare him right now."

"What about Otsuka?" Fugaku asked.

"I don't have the time. PWI has to clear every shinobi for non-war time mission activity." Otsuka spoke up from her seat next to him.

"Kin Yamanaka?" Minato asked, more pointed toward Otsuka than anyone else.

It was Shiakaku who responded however, "T&I just requested him for help with their current overflow. They're having trouble negotiating the prisoner of war exchanges, especially with Iwa."

Otsuka placed the folder she'd been reading over on her lap; Shikaku had supplied all four of them with one. It was filled with reports from every shinobi who had been involved with taking down Orochimaru and Danzo. "We have been training up councilors, recently I've accepted some civilians into the program but most are shinobi. However I believe I have two people who could handle the deprograming together."

Shikaku met her eyes and gave her a subtle nod which told her he approved of the suggestion he knew she was going to make. "Matsusuke Akimichi and Mebuki Haruno."

"Mebuki?" Minato was staring at his wife in shock and Fugaku looked about as close to shocked as he probably could come. Hiruzen's brow furrowed but he prompted Otsuka to continue with a nod.

"Matsusuke Akimichi was one of the first to offer to join the program when we started it. He has years of experience with psychology now and is an incredibly trust worthy shinobi. Mebuki has been shadowing me for as long as I've had my job. If anyone knows the proper procedures for something like this it's her." Otsuka turned her gaze on Fugaku.

"She has been through Danzo's programing and came out the other side. One of the most important parts of programming is empathy and having someone who has been through it to talk to. She'll be an

invaluable resource."

"We'd have to pardon her in order for her to be eligible to help." Minato said, carefully. He was studying his wife from behind his desk, fingers laced together and his chin resting on them.

"Inochi cleared Mebuki last night, correct? Regardless of her previous allegiance her actions prove that she is trustworthy. Kushina's report relay's that she is quite confident that Mebuki set the seal off on purpose. All of the information she gave us on Orochimaru and Danzo was accurate. Have an ANBU watch her, and Matusuke will do the rest." Otsuka folded her hands in her lap.

"You'd vogue for her?" Hiruzen asked.

"Yes." Otsuka shifted to face Hiruzen. "She has the experience and the motivation to do well. It seems to me the best way to make sure Mebuki really has the best of intentions is to set a trap. If she fails them we'll know she can't be trusted. If she succeeds then she'll have our trust."

Fugaku scowled. "But you'd give her the access to Root members she very well may have worked with. She could do the opposite and manipulate them to serve her own goals."

"She could. But I have faith we could catch her." Shikaku added. "Her daughter is now the Hokage's wife's goddaughter. She created a safety net for her child, and then turned herself in. It's a risk, but a calculated one. And she won't be unchecked."

Both Minato and Otsuka frowned at that. "We'll have her shadowed. By both ANBU and UPD members. Ask Matsusuke first before we bring Mebuki in." Minato opened the folder on his desk scanning for Kushina's report. "We're working on the story we will release to the public about Danzo and Orochimaru. Depending on what we decide Mebuki's role may need to be adjusted. We'll continue our meeting tomorrow. Dismissed."

Fugaku bowed to Minato before he left and Otsuka sighed and relaxed back into the couch she was sitting on.

"I am impressed, Otsuka." Hiruzen spoke up. "It is good to see members of the council who will not allow their emotions to get in the way of advising the Hokage."

Otsuka gave Hiruzen a thin smile. "It's my pleasure." Hiruzen smiled

back, before taking his leave. Shikaku waited until the door closed behind him to turn to his cousin, raising an eyebrow at her.

“Set the seal off on purpose, eh? You’re getting better and better at this Otsuka.” Shikaku frowned when he didn’t get any response from her.

“Kushina didn’t say anything about Mebuki in her report did she.” Minato stated more than asked. Otsuka shook her head.

“They won’t read those files. They’ll both trust Shikaku to have read them and speak up if I was wrong. Besides, Kushina's handwriting looks like chicken scratch unless it’s Fuinjutsu. Which is a little Ironic.” Otsuka set the folder to the side and curled her legs up beside her.

“Do you think she set the seal off on purpose?” Minato asked.

“No. But Mebuki had a child to look out for now, so I doubt she’ll try anything. Besides,” Otsuka met Minato’s eyes. “We can’t fail our shinobi again. I won’t let it happen.” *I’m behind you* , was basically what she was communicating. Behind you, until the very end.

Minato gave his wife a grateful smile. “Thank you.” Otsuka nodded.

“Well. I better get back to work. It’s been long enough and I have a desk full of paperwork to get started on. And a new secretary to find.” Otsuka stood, handing her file over to Shikaku. “Shikaku, don't forget you and Yoshino are having dinner with us tonight.”

Minato winced. He needed a new secretary too, especially if he wanted to be home in time for dinner tonight. “Hey Shikaku, you wouldn’t happen to know anyone who I could bring in as my new secretary.”

“You may not steal my secretary.” Shikaku glared at Minato.

~

Otsuka was sure that Itachi and Sasuke were possibly the cutest babies she’d ever seen. Besides Sakura that is. Otsuka had agreed to watch the twins while Mikoto, Fugaku, and Kushina went on a trip to

Uzushio for five days. Kushina was needed in Uzushio and Mikoto, who had been dealing with postpartum depression, was going with her to gain a little bit of normalcy back. Fugaku had decided to go with them because… she wasn't entirely sure why but Minato had agreed before she could ask why and Otsuka knew there was probably something more there.

She hadn't asked Minato afterwards either because if he wasn't concerned then she wouldn't be. Plus, it meant she got to take care of two adorable newborns for most of a week. Kakashi and Obito hadn't been happy about it, complaining their crying would keep them up all night. But Obito had been convinced once he realized Shisui would be staying with them as well. Then Obito had given Kakashi his puppy dog eyes and well… no one in the house was immune to Obito's puppy eyes.

It didn't matter tonight though, because Otsuka had the house to just herself, Sasuke, and Itachi. The children had decided to have one huge sleepover at Gai and Genma's new apartment, and had taken Shisui with them. Minato wasn't likely to be home at all tonight since there was no family dinner and he usually took any free time to do more work.

Otsuka settled in her bed, with Sasuke who refused to ever be put down in one arm while Itachi slept cuddled between pillows next to her, and had begun to read her the new book on parenting she had bought home yesterday. She hadn't realized she had access to just about every library in Konoha until very recently. She was genuinely surprised by the amount of parenting books in T&I's restricted library.

It was an interesting read. Talking about the importance of creating a clear area for a child that could be considered a safe zone for them. She was half-way through when she heard rummaging downstairs. She smiled. Someone was home early.

The door opened a minute later to reveal Minato with snacks piled into his arms. He closed the door behind him with his foot and smiled at her. "I brought your favorite." He pointed awkwardly to the packaged bowls of what Otsuka knew was Ichiraku ramen. She grinned and set her book aside, making a gimme gimme motion with her free hand.

Minato laughed and moved around the room, setting the multiple bowls of ramen down on Otsuka's nightstand and then depositing everything else on the bed. He eased himself down onto the bed,

doing his best not to disturb a sleeping Itachi and then held his hands out so he could take Sasuke from Otsuka.

Otsuka handed him off a little reluctantly. The promise of ramen was enticing but Sasuke was adorable. Minato tucked Sasuke into his chest and watched on with a smile as Otsuka dug into her first bowl of ramen.

“So I’ve been thinking about names.” Otsuka only hummed back at Minato. The man chuckled softly and turned his gaze to the tiny baby in his arms. In a few months he’d be holding his own baby boy, he sighed a little dreamily and then looked back at his wife. “I was thinking of Naruto.”

Otsuka paused. She gave her husband an incredulous look. “Look I know I’ve been eating a lot of ramen, but I don’t really think we should name our baby after my craving Minato…”

Minato laughed and shook his head. “No, no like in Jiraiya’s book.”

It dawned on Otsuka at that moment that Minato looked so at ease with a baby in his arms. She smiled at her husband while she thought about the name. “Naruto Namikaze…. Hmmm.” She actually kind of loved it. “He’s going to have to explain to everyone he’s not named after a Ramen topping.”

Minato shrugged. “Technically Naruto means Maelstrom.”

“Oh yeah because *that's* what everyone's first thought is.” Otsuka set her bowl down and shifted to face Minato. “Okay, I’ll think about Naruto. What do you think about Kame?”

Minato’s brow furrowed. “Your dad’s name?” He was a little surprised, Otsuka never mentioned her father. In fact they rarely talked about any of the family Otsuka had lost. Minato realized after almost 9 years of marriage he knew next to nothing about Otsuka’s father. He was Shikaku’s uncle, he was KIA, and he was Otsuka’s father. That was about it.

Otsuka nodded. “I’d like to honor my father especially if the baby has the same nara kekkei genkai mutation my father had.”

Minato froze. “Your father had a kekkei genkai mutation?”

“Yeah, his shadow manipulation allowed him to do more than have an enemy mimc his movements, he could practically puppeteer them.”

Otsuka frowned. “You didn’t know?”

Minato didn’t respond, a little lost in thought. Something had clicked for him. It had always bugged him just how often Otsuka was a target. As soon as her mother had died Otsuka had suddenly become the prime target of manipulation. But now Minato understood why Danzo had always been after more than just Kakashi. He didn’t trust Otsuka because he couldn’t control her, and if he couldn’t control Otsuka then he’d take her out of the equation. That way if she left Konoha she wouldn’t take the powerful mutation with her.

“Minato?” Otsuka was looking at him concerned. He snapped out of his thoughts and gave her a weak smile.

“Sorry, sorry. It’s nothing. I like Kame. Maybe we could give him two first names? Kame Naruto Namikaze? Naruto Kame Namikaze?”

“No, no I hate the way two first names look.” Otsuka reached over and plucked Sasuke out of Minato’s arms so she could relax against him. Minato wordlessly shifted so she could be more comfortable. He started playing with her hair knowing she liked it, and stopped to enjoy the moment. “Kame Namikaze.” Otsuka sounded out.

Minato didn’t mind it, he supposed. It sounded nice enough, besides it was Otsuka’s fathers name. He wasn’t sure he even wanted to argue with that.

“I hate it.” Otsuka spoke up suddenly. “It’s like an almost rhyme. Naruto it is.” Minato blinked a few times as a fog seemed to settle over his brain.

“But- your dad-” He started to argue and Otsuka shrugged.

“Kame is a wonderful name, it also sounds terrible with Namikaze. Naruto on the other hand has a nice ring. And well, being named after Ramen isn’t the best, but you’re not exactly known for your naming skills are you.”

“Hey!” Otsuka laughed. Minato couldn’t keep the pout on his face with how infectious Otsuka’s laugh was. So infectious that a third laugh joined them. Both soon to be parents stopped and looked down at the smiling *and* laughing Sasuke.

“Oh my god Mikoto is going to kill me.” Otsuka whispered, but she was smiling down at the baby in her arms.

Chapter End Notes

Alright guys so, we are coming up on the last chapter. I haven't decided whether I'm going to split it into two chapters or one. I have two AU's for this story I want to write, so those will be posted after this story is finished. Once both AU's are posted I will start editing this story. I'm both excited and sad for this story to end, but either way thank you all for joining me on this journey!

If you're interested here are the AU's I'm going to be writing.

ANBU!Otsuka x Hokage!Minato

and

Otsuka x Mikoto: Sapphic romance? Can someone say YES PLEASE

Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Please read the authors note at the end. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kushina grinned at Otsuka as she raised her feet to rest on the coffee table, Itachi in her arms. “So he thought the best thing to do was to wash all your clean clothes?”

Otsuka sighed, hands draped atop her baby bump. “I’m just glad it was a false alarm. Otherwise I’d be in the hospital with no clothes. Wait, watch this. Minato!” At Otsuka’s call practically the entire house appeared in the living room in a second flat.

“What? Are you having contractions again?” Minato was beside her in an instant, hands worriedly flitting about.

“No, I was just going to ask for some tea….” Otsuka smiled gently, while Kushina broke into hysterical laughter.

Minato nodded empathetically. “Of course. Coming right up!” He turned on his heel, pushing past both the ANBU team and his children, who had all appeared in the hallway the same time as he had. After Tsunade had put Otsuka on house rest, Minato had moved just about every operation in Konoha into their house.

Every meeting with the Hokage was held in the house, to the point that Otsuka had become well acquainted with both Kiri and Suna’s delegates. There were about eight different ANBU teams that patrolled the grounds, and the Hokage’s guard tended to laze around the house all day. Plus all three of Minato’s secretaries had taken up offices in the library while all missives came through the sunroom.

The only place in the House that wasn’t turned into the Hokage tower at this point was the dojo. But even then the ANBU had taken to sleeping in the dojo on their off time.

Shisui, who practically lived in the house now and followed Minato around like a lost puppy, followed Minato into the kitchen to help make tea. Otsuka, although she’d never admit it, took some pleasure in watching Minato run around in his Hokage robes at her beck and call. Rin moved from the hallway to sit next to Otsuka and smiled at

the still laughing Kushina.

“Oh man, you have Minato whipped.” Kushina smiled, and shifted Itachi a little when his face scrunched up at the uncomfortable position he was in.

Otsuka winked at her friend, and pulled Rin into a side hug. “I try. How’s Sasuke? Has he recovered from that cold?”

“Mostly. He’s been very vocal about how he feels about his cold. Fugaku is probably half deaf at this point.” Kushina stood and smiled. “Well, I should be on my way. I promised my husband and wife I’d be back before 3. Thank you for packing up my room ahead of time!”

Otsuka waved her hands. “It wasn’t even me. Obito and Rin did most of the work.”

“Well thank you Obito, Rin!” Kushina reached over and pocketed the scroll. “You too Kakashi-kun! I know you helped.” Kushina scooped him into a hug and was on her way a minute later.

“You’re tea m'lady.” Minato waltzed into the room, depositing the tea in front of Otsuka. Shisui followed behind mimicking Minato’s steps, a tea cup and saucer in his hands.

Otsuka accepted the tea and let it rest on top of her baby bump. “Why thank you good sir.”

~

October 10th. The same birthday as her father’s. Otsuka was quite happy with Naruto’s timing. He had patiently waited for Otsuka to wake up, have her tea, and had given plenty of time for her to finish her book before he decided to tell her it was time for him to come out. Minato hadn’t washed all her clean clothes this time either.

He’d been far from calm the entire labor but Naruto had practically pushed himself out. Otsuka marveled at the baby in her arms. He was so peaceful as he slept against her chest. “He’s adorable.” She remarked to Minato.

“He is.” Minato was laying next to her in the bed, head resting on the

other side of her chest. His hand reached out and ran through Naruto's fluffy soft hair.

"He looks just like you too." Otsuka froze as Naruto yawned. "Oh my, Minato, I think I'm in love."

Minato's eyes widened, captivated by his son. "I am too…" Naruto had only just been born and yet Minato was quite certain he'd do anything for this little boy. It was at that moment Naruto's face scrunched up and he let out the loudest cry Minato had ever heard.

Otsuka jolted, scared by the abrupt change of Naruto's behavior. Minato reached over and scooped him up. He stood and began to rock him, while simultaneously using his other hand to help Otsuka sit up.

"Is he cold? Or need to be held?" Minato wondered aloud.

"Maybe he's hungry?" Otsuka suggested, she pointed to the formula on the table beside them. It just needed to be made.

"Here take him, I'll make the bottle for you." Minato deposited Naruto into Otsuka's arms and rushed to make the formula. Otsuka smiled at the bundle of joy in her arms. There was something about the boy in her arms she couldn't put her finger on yet. Even as he cried Otsuka could feel it. The slow building of something within her.

"Shh, Naruto. We'll get some food in your stomach quickly. Shhh." Otsuka pressed her baby to her chest and hummed softly. The vibrations seemed to pull Naruto from his wailing as he focused on the weird feeling and sound his mother was producing. Minato stopped what he was doing and turned to his wife, surprised.

"Otsuka….what are you doing?" He questioned, his voice filled with a sort of wonder.

Otsuka frowned. "What do you mean?" She returned to her humming, running her hand soothingly along Naruto's back. It was beginning to feel quite like Naruto was humming back.

"You're- how-" Minato stood still, gently reaching out with his own chakra. He could *feel* Otsuka's chakra reaching out to Naruto and Naruto's somehow responding. The baby boy shouldn't even have access to it yet. Minato's jaw fell open. "It's like your chakra is calling to each other…" Minato trailed off. There was another sound filling the air.

Otsuka's eyes widened as she realized Naruto *was* humming back.

~

At two months old Naruto was already a bundle of sunshine. His favorite thing to do was stick everyones hair in his mouth and *hum* at his mother. Tsunade and Shikaku had managed to figure out that this was a side effect of the Nara's Kekkei Genkai mutation. Which meant they both had it. The same way a nara would reach out to connect through shadows was the same way Naruto and Otsuka could reach out to each other.

They didn't even actually need to hum if they were in close contact with each other. But Naruto had learned it and then just never stopped. He would hum at his father too, and even if Minato couldn't respond exactly the same way he'd let Naruto wrap his chakra around his own and it seemed to satisfy Naruto enough.

The only person Naruto loved more than his mother and father was one Kakashi Hatake. And while Kakashi would never admit it, he appreciated that Naruto liked him the best. Even if it meant he was spit up on more times then he'd care to recount. Like right now, he was trying very hard not to think about the spit up that was now all over his shirt.

"Ha ha ha Baka-shi!" Obito was rolling around the ground in hysterics. "He got you good!"

Kakashi silently wished Obito would roll too far and smack into the tree they were all sitting under in training ground 8. He set Naruto down on the picnic blanket and began to clean himself off, still keeping a close eye on Naruto. Otherwise the baby was likely to somehow roll down the hill into the middle of the training ground. Naruto couldn't even crawl yet and he still managed to get himself into the weirdest situations.

Rin laughed at Kakashi too, but she picked Naruto up and began to wipe his spit up off his face. "Minato-sensei! Naruto-kun needs a change of clothes!"

Minato jumped away from Kushina, breaking off their spar, and reached a hand into his medical pouch. He'd begun to keep diapers,

wipes, and spare pacifiers and clothes on him at all times. Flashing to the top of the hill, Minato crouched next to Rin and held out his hands for Naruto.

Naruto was deposited into his fathers hands and then began to *hum* . Minato chuckled, and lay his son on the ground as he let Naruto manipulate his chakra. As long as Naruto didn't have a hold of Minato's shadow he wouldn't actually be able to make Minato do much of anything. Minato pulled off the very cute deer onesie Otsuka had put Naruto in that morning and switched it out with a frilly frog outfit Jiraiya had bought him the week before.

Gently pulling his arms and then legs through the clothes, Minato kept one hand firmly on Naruto. His son already had bad habits of rolling. Minato tossed the deer onesie to Kakashi, because Kakashi would likely go home to change his shirt at this point. The thirteen year old had just been given access to all of Minato's Hirashin's seals and he wasn't likely to take a step more than he needed to.

"Kakashi-" Minato cut himself off when he spotted the hawk circling above the training ground. He sighed. "Well team, it looks like I'm needed in the office. I'll take Naruto and drop him off with Otsuka later. Keep up the training once you're done with lunch. Remember dinner's at 8!" And The Yondaime left with his son in tow.

Naruto charmed the Iwa delegates with slobber. Minato would not apologize for using his son for negotiation. It was good strategy.

~

Otsuka smiled, relaxing in her backyard under the shade of a tree. Shikaku was next to her, basking in both the respite from the sun the shade provided and his own success. It was a rare day when he convinced his cousin, basically sister, to cloud watch with him. She was such a busy body. Even with a one year old she didn't seem to ever take a break.

He didn't get much time alone with her anymore either. Between Jonin commander, Shikamaru, Otsuka's own work and her kids they never had the chance to take a break. He'd never admit it aloud but he missed his cousin.

“Something on your mind?” Otsuka asked, rolling over to face him.

“Yeah. That cloud looks like a deer.” Shikaku pointed.

Otsuka glanced up and rolled her eyes. “Deer my ass. It’s just a blob. You’re not a very good liar Shi.” Shikaku shrugged but didn’t say anything. Otsuka watched him for a moment before rolling back over. After a while she spoke up again. “Thank you Shikaku.”

Shikaku raised an eyebrow. “For what?”

“Believing in me. You’ve always believed in me, from the very beginning.”

Shikaku snorted. “Do you not remember when I called you an idiot for believing in homeschooling?”

Otsuka laughed. “I do, but you proved something to me that night.” She adjusted herself so her head could rest on her arms.

“What?” Shikaku asked, because all he could remember was apologizing and then saying something cryptic.

“That you cared.” Otsuka sighed. “I felt loved.”

“If I remember correctly, I called you a masochist.” Shikaku deflected.

Otsuka smacked him. “Idiot…Still…I meant what I said….. You masochist.” Shikaku spluttered. Otsuka laughed. “Though I’m still not entirely sure what you meant by ‘You’re the only Nara who isn’t broken’.”

Shikaku shrugged, “You’re just ….. not broken.” He replied, but he couldn’t keep the smile off his lips.

Otsuka looked at him. Really looked at him and then mockingly gasped at him as she realized. “You enjoy it don’t you! You love being cryptic and then watching people be confused!”

Shikaku’s smile grew a little bigger, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

~

The End

Chapter End Notes

I’m done! I can’t believe that I’m actually done. A lot of stuff got cut in the final edit for this chapter. I enjoy fluff but it felt kind of like needless exposition. Anyways let’s get down to business.

So the AU’s will be a while in coming. They’re going to be pretty long One-shots so I can’t promise them in a timely manner except that I hope to finish them by August.

After those are finished I will start editing this story again. You likely won’t see any changes until I have completely finished the story on my end and will just mass change everything all at once. That way we don’t have any situations where the chapters don’t line up. I plan to focus mainly on plot. I want events to flow more freely with more explanation to what’s happening. Kakashi’s kidnapping is rather sudden and I didn’t like my lead up to it. I want to incorporate more Kakashi/Obito and have more moments there. I was even considering writing in small snippets of their chunin exams. Not the entire thing though.

I want to give Danzo more agency and flesh him out as an “evil” character. I want more build up for Orochimaru, and maybe even make them separate arcs. So there's a lot still planned for this story!

Thank you for going on this journey with me. I couldn’t be more thankful for all your heart warming comments and love for this story. I’ll see you all soon!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!